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Hedonism on trial : a study in Plato's Philebus.

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Hedonism on Trial

A Study in Plato's Philebus

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Abstract:

In what follows I shall attempt to trace the anti-hedonist arguments presented by Plato in his late dialogue, the *Philebus*. I shall at the same time try to bring out the rationalist approach to ethics that is offered as an alternative. I shall argue that the rationalism put forward by Plato in this dialogue is distinctive and valuable. Although I shall say little about this, the project is offered in response to the recent enthusiasm in contemporary ethics for Aristotle. I shall therefore try to bring out the distinctive concerns about character and integrity that motivate Plato's approach to ethics in the *Philebus*. In the light of this, I hope to make clearer how certain apparently disparate concerns are in fact part of a single project, and to bring out what gets lost when we lose sight of this unity. By focusing attention on hedonism, I shall argue, Plato is able to work out a sophisticated moral psychology, and indeed an approach to thinking about morality and psychology, that differs importantly from a more familiar 'building-blocks' approach to understanding persons. It is, I hope to show, by dealing simultaneously with methodology, metaphysics and psychology that Plato's view of the place of reason in a well-lived human life becomes interesting and perhaps even plausible. If, in the end, it is still 'the philosophical life' that is the best, this will be because of the very specific way in which a life will be allowed to count as *philosophical*.

The Lake Isle

O God, O Venus, O Mercury, patron of thieves,
Give me in due time, I beseech you, a little tobacco-shop,
With the little bright boxes
piled up neatly upon the shelves
And the loose fragrant cavendish
and the shag,
And the bright Virginia
loose under the bright glass cases,
And a pair of scales not too greasy,
And the whores dropping in for a word or two in passing,
For a flip word, and to tidy their hair a bit.

O God, O Venus, O Mercury, patron of thieves,
Lend me a little tobacco-shop,
or install me in any profession
Save this damn'd profession of writing,
where one need's one's brains all the time.

– Ezra Pound

Table of Contents

Philebus Texts

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Taylor, A. E. [1956] *Philebus and Epinomis*. Translation with Introduction. Edited by Raymond Klibansky. Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd. London

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I have relied in the main on Burnet's text, and for the most part followed Dorothea Frede's English translation. I regret very much that, due to space constraints, I have been unable to include the Greek text in the thesis. Occasionally, I have transliterated certain key words, for ease of expression.

Chapter 1

Introductions

No one knows Philebus. Unlike Protagoras, Gorgias, Cratylus, Meno, Phaedo, Crito and Euthyphro, history bears no trace of such a person having ever existed. There are no accounts of him having later gone on to become one of The Thirty, no tales of how he later betrayed Athens, no insinuations about the role he played in having Socrates put to death. Because of this singular silence from external sources (and even from other Platonic dialogues), it has been speculated that Philebus may be an entirely fictional character, one of the few fully fictional character Plato presents. His name may or may not translate something like 'boy-lover'[1] – almost too rich an appellation of our incorrigible hedonist to be a real name.

But while he seems to exist nowhere *outside* of the dialogue that bears his name, Philebus could hardly be said to exist within the confines of the dialogue, either. He makes an early appearance in order to confirm his beliefs, and to make way for a new interlocutor. He briefly confirms that he does indeed hold that 'what is good for all creatures is to enjoy themselves, to be pleased and delighted, and whatever else goes together with that kind of thing' (11b4-6). And he is then immediately dismissed, defence of his thesis handed over to the young Protarchus.

After washing his hands of the matter, he speaks fewer than a dozen times, half of them within the next five pages, and never at length. None of his lines are terribly informative ('Yes, indeed' at 18e5, 'Right' at 18e7). His relation to the other characters in the dialogue and to the silent audience is ambiguous. Some find it obvious that Philebus is the eldest of the group, an ageing beauty at the centre of a group of beautiful, admiring youths. Others[2] find it no less obvious that Philebus is himself one of the beautiful, coy youths.[3] Socrates hardly ever even makes reference to him, so that we

often forget that Philebus is still supposed to be present listening throughout the whole discussion. The exceptional occasions when Socrates does remind us of Philebus' presence are jarring, and noteworthy. But we are never given a composite portrait of his views or life-style. If from history we know nothing whatsoever of Philebus, we are only slightly wiser for having read Plato's *Philebus*. It seems no one, not readers of the Philebus, and not even the characters there depicted, knows Philebus.

And yet somehow, in spite of his reticence, Philebus has something important to teach us; something that we can learn only, or best, from him. All sorts of characters appear and disappear in Plato's dialogues – especially in the later dialogues, various characters and caricatures are forever wandering in, saying their bit, and wandering out of the discussion again. None of this rabble actually dignifies the dialogue in which he appears with his own name. But this shadow-character, Philebus, hovering at the fringes and corners of a frameless dialogue with ragged edges, should be constantly with the reader – the *whole* dialogue is under his name.

I. Character and Virtue Ethics

Philebus' character therefore occasions much speculation. And this is no accident. For it is precisely character – the importance of having or lacking it – that will reveal the heart of the dialogue's contest between the rationalist and the hedonist. The centrality of attention to character in discussing ethics marks out the project of the *Philebus* as pertinent to a recently revived interest in the re-examination of Greek ethics. Broadly, the aim of what is often called 'virtue ethics' has been to challenge certain presumptions of moral philosophy of the last several hundred years.

Taking their inspiration from an approach to ethics they find represented in ancient Greek philosophy and literature,[4] some contemporary philosophers have

questioned whether the aims, questions and focus of both deontologists and consequentialists were the appropriate ones.[5] Both of these prominent strands in moral philosophy assume that it is judgements and intentions, or else acts and their results that are the central concerns of ethics. The aims of such projects characteristically include the hope of giving some way of discerning right from wrong, or dissolving moral dilemmas, and the attempt to justify morality in the face of sceptical attack. But, as those attracted to virtue ethics saw, to approach the topic in this way excludes from the beginning the possibility of certain values and considerations ever arising.[6] That is, to choose the scope of moral philosophy is already to have made some moral judgements – to have already taken a stand on what is valuable. In particular, within both the deontological and consequentialist traditions, the value of virtues, of integrity, of character, of persons becomes either mysterious or else re-described and explained away.[7]

Character ethics, or virtue ethics, is one compelling attempt to re-conceive the project of moral philosophy.[8] Acts do not come from 'agents', but from persons. Intentions and judgements do not appear and disappear into an impersonal void of universal reason – they arise and become intelligible as intentions and judgements within the framework of a complex human person, within the fabric of his outlook and his life as a whole.[9]

There is much that is of value and much that is to be welcomed in this reconsideration of what the project of ethics consists in, not least of which is a new attention to the way our methods affect and infect the content of what we are able to express. But there is a curious deficiency within this young tradition. Although it looks to an ancient tradition for inspiration and sustenance, there is very little involvement with Plato's contribution to these themes. In his insistence on the non-incidental relation

between agents and their acts,[10] and between acts and their consequences, and in his interest in virtue and the virtues and the place of these in a human life, in his preoccupation with the proper education of the emotions, Plato speaks emphatically within the orientation characteristic of virtue ethics. In spite of this, most philosophers working within (or against) this field have been more or less explicitly concerned with Aristotle, remaining impressively deaf to what Plato's considerations of value in human life might have to add. The silence is spectacular not just because Plato is, after all, one of the most prominent philosophers of ancient Greece, and one of the most significant in the tradition of Western Philosophy. The silence of contemporary writers in ethics is in this case especially thunderous because it is just the themes and concerns of virtue ethics that so clearly engage Plato across several dialogues.

Explanations of this exclusion are manifold. It comes in part from the fact that Plato's ethics has got a bad press – and most distressingly by his friends.[11] In part, it comes from a kind of knowingness mysteriously evoked by his name.[12] We know that Plato had these preposterous and inhuman ideals of rationalism, that he poured scorn or contempt on everything bodily, that the intelligible world accessible to the few was more real and valuable than anything any of us ordinary mortals could ever experience. According to one influential reading, Plato probably began the train of thought whose logical conclusion was Auschwitz.[13] And even if this over-states the case somewhat, he is nonetheless a philosopher to deal with very cautiously, and with a certain scepticism when it comes to ethics.[14] There are of course those who are, perhaps, simply more moved by Aristotle, more engaged with recovering a sense of the integrity of his thought.[15] They do not endorse some caricature of Plato's ethics – they simply remain silent. But many seem to conclude, either by their silence, or even more explicitly, that Plato just was not much of a moral philosopher – moral philosophy *really* began with

Aristotle.[16]

But part of the reason for the half-hearted consideration of Plato as an active contributor to live questions in ethics is, one might say, his own fault. Even for the more patient thinkers among us, it is admittedly notoriously difficult to sort out just *how* to deal with Plato as a moral philosopher.[17] He discusses virtue, the virtues, and the good in many different, possibly incompatible, ways in many different dialogues, and the dialogue form itself presents an ambiguous relation between the author and the Socratic maxims he dramatises.[18] Moreover, unlike Aristotle, he did not write one or two handy texts, called *Ethics*, and have done with it when turning to some metaphysics or methodology or psychology. Disentangling his ethics from his metaphysics and his dialectical method seems a formidable, if not impossible task.

Aristotle, at least, seems to have found a way of doing ethics without getting distracted by messy metaphysical and methodological issues. And there are many different ways of reintroducing Aristotle's rich account in the *Nicomachean Ethics* into contemporary concerns. Some readings focus on the significance of good up-bringing in becoming a good person, and so in the role of tradition, of social norms, of culture in determining what is to count as valuable.[19] Some attend to the perspectival emphasis, expressed in the maxim that 'good is what the good man considers good'.[20] Some look more at the concept of what kind of thing a virtue is, and the relation of this to the natural function or functions of human beings.[21] Some appreciate the sheer variety of virtues that an Aristotelian approach would seem to offer.[22]

But if Aristotle is taken to endorse a plurality of values without any unifying principle, or without any claims to be relevant to all human beings,[23] or if he is read as a naturalist in his view of the sources of value[24] (and these are separate but not incompatible views), then genuine ethical discourse seems doomed from the start. If you

and I are brought up within the same tradition, we can communicate with each other, but we might not have anything very interesting to say, because we cannot articulate a position from which to make a constructive critique of what we already understand to be good. Relativism (like hedonism) can get very sophisticated and still be relativism. If, on the other hand, we suppose it is important to understand everything we value and our ability to value as a biological inheritance – and that this should be our reference point and standard in evaluating the desirability of this or that, or (at a higher order) the desirability of valuing this or that – then our only option is to determine what are the materials we have been given. Should we discover that the origin and heart of justice is 'tit-for-tat', appeals to our biological inheritance, however sophisticated, will provide no basis for saying justice should be otherwise – and still less ground for articulating what else it, perhaps, should or could be. In neither case is there any space for saying, articulately, reasonably and persuasively, 'I *know* this is the way it has *always* be done, or understood; but I think we should do things, or understand what we are doing, differently.' We may be pessimists, and conclude that this is, in fact, the case. Or we may, with Plato, look around and see that, in spite of the difficulties, discussion of value in fact goes on all the time, across the widest cultural differences. And we may wonder what must be true about the world, about human beings and value, that could make this so.[25]

If we feel this is an important space to keep open for discussion, an important possibility to keep alive,[26] then we will have to reconsider our aversion to enmeshing metaphysical and methodological questions in our ethical inquiries. It is largely the reluctance to treat methodology with psychology with metaphysics in thinking about value that has reinforced a frustrating myopia in moral philosophy.[27] Supposing that ethics is the kind of thing that *could* be neatly disentangled from everything else ensures

that we remain deaf to the kind of universalism and rationalism in ethics that Plato thought was possible, and important to cultivate – an endorsement of reason quite different from what Kant thought was necessary in order to preserve us from relativism and determinism.[28] According to the view put forward in the *Philebus*, I shall argue, careful reflection on what constitutes a good human life, in the most formal terms, and so consideration of what qualities make any good thing (including a human life) good are not separate projects. Taken as a whole such reflection should help to give some indication about how to go about thinking of these things in each case, and help also to recognise what is a situation suitable for ethical reflection, and the terms in which it is most appropriate to conceive of that situation. Aristotle, on one reading, insists upon the importance and the irreducibility of 'how the good man sees things'.[29] Plato asks: what can we learn about human value from the fact that there is such a thing as a good perspective or interpretation of a world and a life, of situations and persons? What kind of authority can or should such a way of looking have? In the process of addressing these questions, I shall argue, Plato finds that attention to sources of value – good-making qualities – can (without dictating the specific content of any good human life) provide a means of setting reasonable limits for everyone on what could possibly count as good, and therefore what could possibly count as good for a human person, in a human life and world. He thus gives what a descriptive approach to ethics cannot: a truly normative account of what might (and what cannot) count, for human beings, as 'flourishing'.[30]

The price of deafness to Plato's project is high. For, it is not just determining what is to count as flourishing, or as a natural function of man, that has left virtue ethics in a vexed state. Even more, difficulties in determining how best to go about even considering the question have left the field stuck between either more or less clumsy

attempts to read off sophisticated values from evolutionary psychology – using biology as a *guide* to the values we *should* hold – or else irritatingly unhelpful reiterations of Aristotle's principle that 'what is good is whatever seems so to the good man'. Aside from the intrinsic interest of Plato's thought generally, his approach to moral philosophy in the *Philebus* works as both a complement and a challenge to Aristotle's ethics. Speaking firmly within the same conversation, he does not merely repeat what modern theorists seem to find so compelling in Aristotle. Some of the questions he raises must be taken as settled in order for Aristotle's investigations to get off the ground;[31] some of the questions he poses challenge seriously whether Aristotle's project is the one we most need,[32] or whether it can ever deliver on its promises (especially on the promise to have something still pertinent to say to us today about ethics) once we have lost faith in his biological teleology.

Opening up discussion on Aristotle's ethics has had the beneficial consequence of turning much needed attention to persons (and not just 'agents') and their overall character in our consideration of value. But it is attention to the more basic questions of normativity generally, of the nature of reason, judgement and intelligibility, of the relations between the kind of thing reality is and the kind of thing human beings and their lives are, that opens up the possibility for a far different conception of what ethics is, and why we do it.[33] Attention to Plato invites us to press the weak points of virtue ethics – we might find that certain aspects cannot be salvaged; or we might find that certain virtues of this approach to ethics acquire a different cast, an added depth or a different character, and we may gain a different understanding of what we are doing and saying and how it fits in. If Plato's ethics can address some of the disadvantages of virtue ethics, it will be by recovering the significance of the universalism Plato advocates, and of the primacy of reason he insists upon in considerations of value.[34] But

if this happens, we may well not – in a certain sense – be talking about virtue ethics any longer.

The hope is that if we accept what I shall claim to be Plato's invitation to attend closely to the details of how honest discussion happens, and how it differs from ideological persuasion,[35] then we will discover ways and means of setting limits on what could count as acceptable, without doing injustice to the very real pluralism in values within a person, within a culture, and across peoples and cultures. We do not get a decision procedure from Plato; he offers no algorithm for determining right and wrong, or good and bad – and it is important that he does not. Besides the liability of any such proposed algorithm to a long, slow death by counter-example, the thought that one could have such a thing – or that having it would be desirable, a 'solution' to the 'problem' of ethical reflection and action – represents a deeply mistaken view of human beings, their lives, and value.[36] Ethics is not a problem, or series of problems to which we are seeking a solution; living is an enterprise or project that we hope and strive to engage in as well as possible. Ethics is not about acts, but about practices; it is not about axioms, but about outlooks; and it is not about agents, but about persons. In this much Plato and Aristotle are largely in agreement. Plato's aim is to take up these broad assumptions, examine them and explore what they might reveal about what must therefore be true about practices, about outlooks and persons, about ethical reflection and about what is valuable. This aim, I shall claim, is the focus of the *Philebus*.

II. Casting a Wide Net

Because so much is at stake, and because so much is already decided in the mere formulation of the task, interest or questions, it will not be just Philebus' ill-defined character that will contribute to the points Plato is trying to draw out in the *Philebus*. The

indeterminacy of Philebus' character is echoed in the indeterminate setting of the dialogue. There is no narrative frame, indicating how responsibility for the accuracy of the dialogue as a whole has passed from person to person. Nor are there any other context-setting remarks to indicate why or how Socrates should be found here now in the midst of this conversation. Instead, without introduction or explanation, we simply find Socrates summing up a discussion which presumably has been going on for some time before the dialogue opens, assessing the state of affairs thus far, in order to progress further. 'Well, then, Protarchus,' Socrates begins, 'consider just what the thesis is that you are now taking over from Philebus – and what *our* thesis is that you are going to argue against, if you find that you do not agree with it' (11a1-b1). We are given no details about how the discussion has gone up to now, and only the barest indication of why Protarchus is called in to champion the hedonist cause. He has to, he says, since 'fair Philebus has given up on us' (11c8).

This abrupt opening is mirrored in the very last line of the dialogue, which – after a triumphant victory speech from Socrates (67b1-7) – manages in a few words to create a cliff-hanger ending after all. After agreeing that what Socrates has said 'is as true as possible' (67b8), Protarchus nonetheless refuses to let him go. 'There is still a bit missing, Socrates,' he says. 'Surely you will not give up before we do. But I will remind you of what is left!' (67b10-11). Disconnected from anything in the immediate context, it is very unclear what Protarchus supposes still needs to be addressed – it is unclear whether he is right to think a bit more is necessary, whether he even has something specific in mind, and whether Plato thought it at all obvious what this remark should refer to. It may even seem to be a joke, the dogged youths persisting in conversation with an evasive Socrates, just as Socrates is portrayed in earlier dialogues refusing to release his reluctant victims from the joys of dialectic. At any rate, it seems most

effectively designed to invite speculation (about what might still be necessary, given the foregoing discussion as a whole) just as the opening lines invite speculation about what exactly Philebus' position was, how the discussion with him went, what it was about, and mostly why it is that he is no longer participating. Is he fed up, or just bored? Has he been refuted, or perhaps only (at least) sufficiently embarrassed by Socrates? Is it perhaps Socrates who has become frustrated with the defender of pleasure? They seem, judging from where Socrates takes up the discussion with Protarchus, to have made very little headway in their unwritten exchange. Or might it be that the disputants have simply agreed to begin afresh, with a new counsel for the defence?

All of this inconclusiveness, however, has the effect of forcing powerfully and inescapably to the fore themes that are integral to the *Philebus*. Already we cannot help but ask ourselves methodological questions: what does a discussion need in order to be complete? What are the proper starting points? How are they to be determined? How do subsequent agreements relate to their predecessors? How, in particular, are we to frame a discussion of ethics? The text here, in setting the agenda, is glaringly and deliberately vague. From the way it is stated, it is not even clear whether Philebus' claim is supposed to be a descriptive one, a prescriptive one, or both at once. Socrates' thesis – 'that not these [pleasure and delight], but knowing, understanding, and remembering, and what belongs with them, right judgement and true calculations, are better than pleasure and more agreeable to all who can attain them' (11b6-c2) – hardly disambiguates the issue. It is also not explicit whether the search is for goods, for something [that is always] good, for some one good thing in virtue of which all else is good, or perhaps even for the Platonic Form of the Good.[37] We are to discuss living creatures and value – we might assume already that we are most interested in human beings and value,[38] but this leaves open whether the questions to be asked are about goods (good things), good people, good

actions, good intentions, good lives, or the good as such – or perhaps some combination of some or all of these. Are we, should we be, interested in a description of what is in fact valued, or a prescription of what should be valued[39] – of what is valuable whether or not anyone has the sense to recognise this, whether or not anyone or anything at all is 'capable of attaining' it?[40] With so much that is open for debate, it is notoriously difficult to know how we are even to find common ground as a basis for discussion, and whether, from whatever common ground it might be possible to clear, it is still possible to say anything substantial at all. Through their abruptness, the first few lines of the dialogue in particular raise these concerns with respect to hedonism. How do we discuss hedonism, and how are we to talk *with* the hedonist (if, indeed we can)? If we cannot, why is that? And even if we can, why should we bother – either with the hedonist or with his hedonism? Unlike the elaborately framed dialogues,[41] we do not have in the *Philebus* any curious friends of friends motivating the discussion through their express interest in a certain theme, conversation or personage. It is precisely the under-description of the circumstances – and the marked contrast of this with so many other dialogues – that brings to the surface concerns usually taken as settled: what are we asking? How are we to pose the question? And why are we asking it?[42]

Using the structure of the dialogue, the context of the discussion, and the characters and personalities involved to focus attention on these themes is not a device confined to the peculiarly under-specified opening and conclusion of the *Philebus*. Worries about the mechanics of the discussion arise over and over again. Socrates is explicit about sign-posting and recalling the dialogue to its initial theme. Before embarking on his division of everything existing into four kinds, he announces that he is going to begin – 'We must be very careful about the starting point we take' (23c1) – and is explicit in referring the current discussion back to the previous one – the division will

be made 'by taking up some of what has been said before' (23c6). When Protarchus is reluctant to acknowledge the possibility of 'false pleasures', Socrates declares that 'we have to forego any excursions here or any discussion of whatever side issues are not directly relevant to our topic' (36d9-10). Finishing with pleasure, Socrates turns to investigate knowledge, saying 'Let us not undertake to give pleasure every possible test, while going very lightly with reason and knowledge' (55c3-4), thus deliberately making good on the parity of treatment promised our two candidates at 14a. But the heavy-handedness of this reminder calls attention to, rather than obscures, the fact that Socrates' candidate will in fact get off with a much briefer treatment than pleasure did.[43] Finally, after the lengthy analyses of pleasure and knowledge, before 'mixing' the good life, Socrates summarises the first part of the dialogue (60a1-61a2); and after revealing the 'prize-winners' of the contest, Socrates threatens Protarchus with yet another summary of how the discussion moved from the beginning to its present conclusion (66d-67a).[44] In spite of all of these clear internal references, however, the reader often finds the discussion has moved onto unfamiliar and unexpected terrain, or that quite a lot of ground has been covered, without being quite sure how it happened, or how one would retrace one's steps.[45]

A famously vexed instance of this occurs at 14c *ff.*, where Socrates introduces a method supposed to solve certain dialectical difficulties.[46] Besides the obscurity of the method described, it is not even certain which are the difficulties the method is meant to solve. It is still less clear, at first, why we should be raising such questions in response to the simple and straightforward contest between pleasure and knowledge (or intellect) with which we began. These worries about what is being asked, and *why*, are hardly dispelled when – after some clarity has been gained about why we might need to discuss 'the one and many' in order to settle the dispute – Socrates suddenly claims that the

unwieldy method just elaborated will not be necessary to resolve the debate, after all. Instead he recollects some saying, perhaps heard in a dream, which 'if we can clearly conceive now. . .is the case' will mean that 'we will not have to worry any longer about the distinction of kinds of pleasure' (20c2, 5-6).

The conversation that follows relates more obviously to the expressed intentions of the dialogue. Protarchus is set up as judge over the two favoured candidates, measured against three criteria of goodness which are agreed upon by the two interlocutors. It certainly seems an *ad hoc* approach to the problem, but at least we are now openly discussing pleasure, knowledge and their respective worth. But instead of resolving the conflict between the hedonist and the rationalist, Protarchus' momentary rôle as common-sense judge only serves to reformulate the question at issue. The reformulation settles some issues – it turns out that Philebus' claim had been that pleasure is the one good, it is always good, and the only good – but it raises new ambiguities at the same time. Having bestowed 'first prize' on the unchampioned candidate – the mixed life – Socrates initiates a further contest between Philebus and himself, this time for 'second prize'.

> We have rather to make up our minds about the second prize, how to dispose of it. . . One of us may want to give credit for the combined life to reason, making it responsible, the other to pleasure. Thus neither of the two would be the good, but it could be assumed that one or the other of them is its *cause*. But I would be even more ready to contend against Philebus that, whatever the ingredient in the mixed life may be that makes it choiceworthy and good, reason is more closely related to that thing and more like it than pleasure. (22d1-8)

'Second prize' usually implies a lesser good of the same sort – a runner who is not quite as fast as the first-prize winner. But Socrates makes it clear enough that 'second-prize' is

not the same as 'second-best'; it is rather the 'cause' of the good life, or perhaps the cause of the goodness in a good life, which will get that honour. But 'causes' are usually[47] considered ontologically prior and normatively superior to their effects. What is more, knowledge or pleasure may not even *be* this 'cause'; one of them may be merely 'akin' to it, or 'more akin' to it than the other. But the nature of this kinship to a cause of goodness is even more puzzling than the unspecified source of goodness itself. It may indicate a different species or some generic sort, or it may mean simply that two things resemble each other in some incidental respect, without the relationship between them going any deeper than that.[48]

As troubling as the fresh ambiguity is simply the *manner* in which we have moved from our contest for 'first prize' to the new playing field. In his deceptively understated way, Socrates has told Protarchus that 'there are some small matters we ought to agree on first' (20c8). Amongst these 'small matters' was included the agreement that

> This point is most necessary to assert of the good: that everything that has any notion of it hunts for it and desires to get hold of it and secure it for its very own, caring nothing for anything else except for what is connected with the acquisition of some good. (20d6-9)

On this basis alone Protarchus is allowed to testify against the life of pleasure.[49] And it is Protarchus' testimony that decides the fate of the thesis that pleasure and good name the same thing. While we each might personally be inclined to agree with his judgement, something seems fishy about the whole procedure.[50]

But as soon as the new plan is announced, there is yet another jarring twist in the conversation. Declaring that the battle for second prize is a difficult one (23b5-6),[51] and that they must be careful about their starting-points (23c1), Socrates suddenly starts

talking metaphysics. As in the discussion of method, the point of the introduction of the four genera is not clear until the end of the passage, where they are tied – artlessly? – to the various candidates for the good. Each of the candidates – three, now that Protarchus has ruled in favour of the dark horse, 'the mixed life' – fits conveniently into three different categories. There is even one genus left to spare. And just as the purpose of the four-fold ontology does not become clear except in light of how it comes to be used, so too the significance of the classification of pleasure and knowledge/mind unfolds only slowly, throughout the rest of the dialogue. As before, when the lives of pleasure and of knowledge were put on trial, the method by which the candidates are placed according to their respective genera is highly suspect, although for different reasons in each case. The elusive Philebus, silent since 22c and shortly to be speaking his last, is responsible for classifying pleasure as 'unlimited'. In case we had doubts about Philebus' ability to fail utterly to get the point of the foregoing discussion, Plato has Socrates immediately and in few words demonstrate how poor are the hedonist's grounds for supposing pleasure to be unlimited (28a1-3). He nonetheless accepts the conclusion – 'But take note that pleasure is thereby assigned to the boundless' (28a3-4) – and goes on to offer a most peculiar argument of his own, in favour of considering that 'reason belongs to that kind which is the cause of everything' (30d10-e1). In a dialogue explicitly devoted to the humble topic of the good human life, Socrates introduces, with mock solemnity, the principles of the organisation of the cosmos as a whole and the relation of human beings to that whole.[52] This 'cosmological argument' looks strikingly out of keeping with the otherwise pragmatic tone of the dialogue.

In sum, we find that everywhere the dialogue is written so that we as readers are perplexed, just as Protarchus is occasionally depicted as being perplexed, about just where the discussion is going and how it will get there, while at the same time previous

agreements are quietly having their belated effect. The implications become manifest as the discussion unfolds, and we are left wondering how it is we got this far in the discussion, and why we should find ourselves just here. At each turn, Plato insists that we reflect again on the method and structure in the movement of the dialogue. This technique culminates in the 'double conclusion' of the dialogue. Before irresolution is introduced in the very final line of the dialogue, the *Philebus* has what look to be two alternative conclusions in succession.[53] The first ending (59e-64b) describes the good life, and turns out to be more of a case study in how to go about determining the structure of a good life. The second, briefer ending (64c-67b) is a summary of the interlocutors' findings on goodness in human life. But with no explanation, we find five rankings, instead of the two – or, at most, three – expected. None of the ranks includes the good life itself, and it is unclear whether the rankings have been confined to *human* goodness after all.

III. Challenge and Reply to the Significance of Dramatic Conventions

Of course, an alternative explanation of the apparent erraticness of the dialogue might be that an ageing Plato, somewhat past it in his literary powers, has a few philosophical left-overs and loose ends, points he had wanted to pursue.[54] Whether due to lack of time or interest, or to ill health,[55] Plato does not or cannot explore each of these various themes on their own, and they sit ill alongside one another. He nonetheless throws them together, resuscitating the old saw against mindless hedonism as a vehicle for presenting further thoughts on his mature methodological, epistemological, and metaphysical views.[56] Such an approach to the *Philebus* may make very little sense of the abrupt turns of the dialogue – but then, it was not intended to. This approach begins with the premise that there is very little, if any, sense there to be made.

Inattention to the elegances (or lack thereof) in Plato's literary style is not unheard of. But to neglect philosophical consideration of such niceties is an especial relief when it comes to the *Philebus*. For over-written and underdescribed transitions, although particularly rampant, are almost the least of the difficulties in interpreting the dialogue. Some parts within the dialogue seem flatly incompatible with one another – most notoriously, the two separate discussions involving *peras* (limit) and *apeiron* (unlimitedness).[57] Others seem simply to be unlikely bedfellows: cosmological arguments better suited to the project of the *Timaeus* appear alongside an entirely new and unexpected four-fold ontology. These co-exist with disregarded methodological remarks that may or may not recall, reiterate, or revise previous remarks on Collection and Division. And these all seem to have no more necessary connection to each other than each has to the reconstituted arguments against the hedonist – arguments by now grown somewhat tiresome except for an intriguing but equally misplaced (and disproportionately long) treatment of comedy. Even ignoring the structural and dramatic elements of the dialogue, if the *Philebus* is *not* a grab-bag of miscellaneous philosophical tricks and fireworks, a commentator has a hard road ahead.

A hard road, true – but a rewarding one. If we read the transitions and characters in the dialogue – and the occasional lack of transition, and lack of characterisation – not as clumsy, but rather as deliberate, we can see Plato using the dramatic mechanics of the dialogue to press questions often entirely too neglected in ethics. One of these has become especially pressing in the development of moral philosophy over the last fifty years:[58] how are we to conceive of the task of ethics? What is the aim, and how are we to go about it? The trouble (for philosophers – for anyone wanting to think reflectively about value) is that there is no answer to this question which does not presuppose certain values (and so possibly close down our sensitivity to others).[59] The result is that one has

to argue for a certain conception of ethics as a project at the same time that one argues for this or that action, rule, value, virtue, principle, end, or maxim. In the *Philebus*, I shall argue, Plato is working self-consciously on both these levels. Thinking about value, he claims, involves considering human lives as a whole, and in addition involves consideration of a human life as the expression of a whole human person. But this claim already presumes much more about value, and what makes it possible, than might appear at first glance. It involves already commitments about what a whole is, what it is to think about a whole, and so claims about the conditions and method of reason, and in particular evaluative judgement. Thus to give an account of method and judgement, of reason and unity, of persons and passions is, I hope to show, one unified project.

IV. Structure of the Content of the Dialogue

The structure, transitions and characters of the *Philebus* play a large role in prompting attention to methods of thinking, and ethical reflection in particular. *If* we can make sense of the structure of the *Philebus* as a single dialogue with a sustained, well-integrated line of argument, then we will be able to see why issues of unity and plurality, the compresence of opposites, hedonism and rationalism, complex psychology and idealist ethics, teleology without divine authority, piety, pragmatism, collection and division as a method in philosophy, the difference between knowledge and true belief, the possibility of falsehood were all of interest to the same philosopher at the same time. And I think it is no accident that these themes should all come together in an ethical dialogue.[60]

As this implies, it is not just through structure, but also by revisiting themes from earlier dialogues – whether to 'rewrite' or just to recall them – that the *Philebus* is able to cover an immense amount of philosophical ground in a very compressed way. Dealing

with these topics concisely, Plato can fit them next to each other, so that they illuminate one another. Themes famous and infamous within the Platonic corpus can be related to one another. Concerns familiar from the *Meno* (80-86) about the starting and finishing-points of inquiry are related to the *Phaedo*'s worry about unity and plurality (73-78), about explanation and causation (96-106), and to the puzzles about unity, Forms and intelligibility in the *Parmenides* (esp. 129-135). These work together with the analysis of sensation, perception and knowledge explored in the *Theaetetus* (152-186) to reconsider the story of pleasure presented in *Republic IX*. In the light of the conjunction of these, we can see why the hedonist was such a recurrent figure for Plato, whether he is having Socrates defend him in the *Protagoras*, or else assert against him, in the *Gorgias*, that 'the body is a tomb'. This accordion technique of expressing one thought by juxtaposing and relating tersely expressed complex ideas elaborated elsewhere will be used to great dramatic effect in the final two pages of the dialogue.

As a foil against which to articulate his position, Plato recalls the figure made famous by Callicles one last time in Philebus, who – unknown to history, and scarcely better known from the dialogue – carries the torch of hedonism, casting his long shadow over the whole of the dialogue, making it a whole by holding it together thematically, even in his virtual absence. And although Philebus' character does occasion much speculation, it would be disingenuous to pretend that we know nothing at all about him. There are some things we can infer, if cautiously, with some conviction. Philebus is not, for example, the sometime defender of the hedonist cause, as Protarchus may be. He is an incorrigible, unreformable hedonist. 'To my mind,' he tells Protarchus, as he relinquishes control of the argument, 'pleasure wins and always will win, no matter what' (12a8). Whether he has thought about his hedonism, or is willing to, he is convinced of it. But for all that, he is not a demagogue, wanting to impose his view on

everyone. For he continues, 'But you must see for yourself, Protarchus' (12a9). This may represent the tolerant view that everyone must think these issues through for himself;[61] more likely, in light of his subsequent comments, Philebus simply cannot be bothered to care much about what Protarchus or anyone else thinks about pleasure and the good. Although the nonchalance is unfamiliar, Philebus' incorrigibility may well remind us of his more famous predecessor from the *Gorgias*. The sparks and drama of a charismatic personality are all given to Callicles. The *Philebus* takes up where the *Gorgias* left off, with the unconvinced hedonist speechless, and dropping out of the discussion.[62]

But Callicles, of course, was not really a hedonist, or at least not straightforwardly, or not *just* a hedonist.[63] He was, more significantly, not overly concerned with consistency, making himself unfit for critical, reflective conversation.[64] This indifference to self-contradiction is linked in a vague way to his hedonism. And this may be echoed by Philebus – why make all this fuss about consistency? It is hardly *fun*. Naturally, this made Callicles, for all his eloquence, a less than ideal philosopher – Philebus is downright poor, and there is a clear pattern of general disruptiveness in his few remarks. Only four pages after having formally withdrawn from the conversation, he suddenly interrupts Socrates, as the latter gives his illustrations of proper method, with an impatient: 'What use is all this talk to us, and what is its purpose?' (18a1-2). He repeats the same objection half a page later, enlisting Protarchus as an ally – 'that is what Protarchus and I have been wanting to see for quite some while' (18d8) – making it obvious that he has not understood the exposition nearly as well as he claims (18d4-6). When he has an objection, he happily speaks even on Protarchus' behalf; when he feels stumped, he goes suddenly silent (19a) or reminds Protarchus that he is responsible for the discussion now. The last we hear from Philebus is an irritable 'Didn't you choose to

speak instead of me?' to Protarchus (28b5). When Protarchus is forced to concede that the life of pure pleasure is not sufficient and complete even in his own view, Philebus suddenly resurfaces to remark pointedly to Socrates, 'Nor is your reason the good, Socrates, and the same complaint applies to it' (22c3). It is not obvious that Philebus is stupid – after all, it is an entirely apt point that Socrates' candidate equally fails to meet the criteria according to which pleasure was denied first prize. And he certainly knows enough to get out of the conversation when his position looks endangered. Most likely, it is not that Philebus is dim – he just cannot be bothered. It is more mental laziness than stupidity that prevents him from seeing the significance of the Divine Method to the discussion of pleasure. Even if he genuinely cannot see what Protarchus can, he does not ask for clarification, but simply asserts his incomprehension. One feels that Philebus, no friend of reason and mind, wants his thinking done for him and his answers handed to him; Protarchus, by contrast, is willing to work to figure it out. That this apathy of Philebus' alone might make someone unsuitable for ethical discourse is already quite revealing about the kind of thing morality and ethical reflection is.

Although the roots of their tolerance of inconsistency may differ, Callicles and Philebus do share the consequences of their indifference. Neither of them is fit to take responsibility for themselves or for the conversation. ('I absolve myself of all responsibility,' Philebus says at 12b1, after confirming the hedonist position and his allegiance to it, 'and call the goddess as my witness.') These are not two unrelated charges – Philebus and Callicles cannot take responsibility for the conversation *because* they cannot be answerable to their own previous thoughts, commitments and agreements. Protarchus tells Socrates that the two of them must 'try to push through to a conclusion with Philebus' consent or not' (12b4) – and it is just as well, because it is not at all clear that Philebus could meaningfully give or withhold his consent. Callicles' agreements

also turn out to be futile; he is depicted outright as having a deeply fragmented – opposed and self-defeating – personality, and cannot endorse his own commitments unequivocally.[65] But these fragments of personality can only come to light in virtue of his other commitments, apart from a mindless devotion to pleasure.

In this regard, fair Philebus does not fare so well. Besides a devotion to pleasure, he expresses no commitments at all.[66] His character, *as a result*, is elusive and indeterminate.[67] This, I would suggest, is Philebus' constant lesson to us. Perhaps there are no knock-down arguments against Callicles – either against his cynical consequentialism or against his hedonism. But there is a price to pay for incorrigibility – a terribly high price, even if Philebus cannot feel his loss.[68] The spectre of Philebus stands, a shapeless amoeba,[69] as a reminder of the genuine alternative: *either* we bow to the demands of truth (consistency and reason) and thus can discuss the relative merits of pleasure and of reason for human life – in which case, we cannot forget that our ability to discuss value at all depends upon our valuing truth; or else we repudiate all concern for consistency and embrace the life and character(lessness) of Philebus or of Callicles. Although Callicles is, admittedly, 'characterless' in a different way from Philebus,[70] setting the two next to one another may help to bring out the point that there is a non-accidental connection between 'mindless' hedonism[71] and the disintegrated self.

V. The Plan

In what follows, I shall address the themes that Plato brings out, largely in the order in which he presents them. The rest of this chapter will be concerned with how Plato sets up the discussion (11a-14c). The next two chapters will deal with structure, with organisation and wholeness, with what counts as unity, and the relation of these to intelligibility (roughly14c-31a). Chapter 4 will bring these general issues of

epistemology, methodology and metaphysics to bear on our understanding of human persons and their lives (31b-51a). With this in hand, we will be prepared to track Plato's refutation of hedonism in Chapter 5 (36c-55c). The argument against hedonism is not at first obvious because, I shall argue, Plato engages in a sophisticated dialectic with hedonism. This choice of strategy is particularly significant given the kind of position he is opposing. The final two chapters will turn to look more directly at what, in the light of this, it means for Plato to be rationalist about ethics, what this sort of rationalism precludes about value in human lives, and what it leaves open (51a-67b).

Taken together, Chapters 2, 3, and 4 set out the rationalist programme. Chapter 2 looks closely at the study in proper method presented in the *Philebus*, its metaphysical underpinnings and general consequences. Through the presentation of an adequate method for coming to understand, Plato engages in a subtle study of intelligibility as such. Understanding consists in grasping the unity of complex wholes, by appreciating the exact relations between parts comprising that whole. Judging implies reference to some intelligible whole. Unity is not a matter of uniformity or homogeneity; rather the unity of fully intelligible wholes with reference to which our judgements become intelligible consists in complexity. But because of this, understanding must proceed from whole to part, not part to whole. That is, the identity of any well-integrated whole is to be grasped not by taking each of the parts in turn, but rather by looking from the whole to how the parts work together within it. And this has normative consequences. For if fully intelligible and well-integrated is part of what it is for any whole to be the whole it is, then this complex unity not only makes sense of there being a 'thing of a certain sort' – it also sets the standard for what a thing of that sort ought to be.

These claims are as much metaphysical as epistemological. For they are a story at once about the nature of understanding and about the sorts of things that are objects of

such understanding. Chapter 2 will also, therefore, look at the four-fold ontology put forward as the grounding of the epistemological-methodological picture. Indeterminacy alone can never become an object for the understanding, because it is not a *thing*, an item, at all. To become a thing requires that there be limits or boundaries. And the boundaries, in their turn, must do some limiting. Thus it is together that indeterminate qualities join with definite measures to create determinate objects, intelligible unities fit for understanding. That limited indeterminacy will indeed be intelligible is explained by the fact that it is according to the demands of intellect and intelligibility that anything comes to be a thing at all.

Chapter 3 takes these very abstract concerns and makes them more concrete, through the distinctive cosmology presented in the *Philebus*. The breadth of Plato's claim begins to come out, as well as the depth of its significance to us. The points about intelligibility and normativity are embedded firmly within this universe of which we are a part; and they are applied to the specific kind of thing we are. Abstract concerns about method, about unity and plurality, about the relations between parts and wholes, are brought closer to home as we find that human souls are also complex unities of the sort relevant to the concerns of Chapter 2, and are able to be such because of their relation to unity, diversity and intelligibility as such.

It is the business of Chapter 4 to spell out the consequences of this claim. If human souls are complex wholes, then we have been given already some general guidelines about how to conceive of them, and how to go about inquiry into them. The actual application of these principles to the examination of the soul turns up a surprising picture of the *psyche*, if we were expecting neat analyses of mental states into beliefs and desires. The result of adhering to the principle of whole-to-part identity and normativity is that a human *psyche* turns out to be something cognitive through and through. This

does not mean, of course, that it is exclusively cognitive, but rather that whatever else there is to being a human soul will be permeated with and affected by the presence of intelligence and other cognitive capacities in the soul. This picture of the *psyche* is, of course, just the sort of picture that a rationalist will need if he is to make his approach to the good life plausible. It is, an unfriendly objector might say, just the sort of psychology a rationalist might be expected to turn up.

Chapter 5 takes on this unfriendly objector. One might suppose that one could simply reject the whole metaphysics, epistemology and moral psychology. The careful and flexible arguments against hedonism come as a response to this supposition. The hedonist camp is divided into two: The sort of hedonist who wants to reject the whole rationalist project of understanding the good for human beings (call this 'simple hedonism'), and the sort of hedonist who is willing to discuss the matter (call this 'enlightened hedonism'). These two sides will be played off each other, until the hedonist friendly to reason finds that the ground beneath his sensible hedonism has crumbled, and he is forced to choose between extreme hedonism and rationalism.

Rationalism, for its part, also has two faces, one very much less attractive than the other. The danger for the rationalist is that he will be forced to despise and repudiate *all* pleasures. There is a sort of devotion to reason that would exclude the value of anything else. This often is couched in terms of aspirations to approximate the divine life of perfect rationality so far as is humanly possible, and consequently goes hand in hand with a certain contempt for the human business of being embodied. Through the course of the dialogue, Socrates has been neatly side-stepping endorsement of this kind of rationalism, and in Chapter 5 we see how he explicitly distances himself from it. Chapter 6 and 7 will look at how he was able to do this and remain a rationalist to the end. Chapter 6 will look at the work done by truth, and the notion of a commitment to

truth, while Chapter 7 sets out the sort of rationalist approach to ethics that Socrates does finally endorse. We will see that according to his view of reason and its place in the universe and within a human life, there is ample space for pleasures – indeed, his rationalism can accommodate them, in the end, much better than can the hedonism of his interlocutors.

VI. The Opening of the Dialogue

Several of these forces – the significance of character, the constant revision, ambiguities, and abrupt transitions – are condensed into the first few pages, setting the tone for the rest of the dialogue. In the brief 'opening skirmish' between the hedonist and rationalist, Socrates begins by securing some preliminary agreements about how the dialogue should unfold. The exact question under consideration then becomes somewhat clearer. It immediately becomes clear, for instance, that internal, and not external, goods will be the only options considered;[72] Socrates specifies, with Protarchus' approval, that they are looking for 'some possession or state of the soul' (11d4).[73] This means that the root of happiness in life is already located in the soul, *psyche* (about which we can as yet be certain of very little); and that this source of faring well (whatever it is) is either something the soul *has*, or else some way the soul has of being, some 'state' that it is possible to be in.[74] The possession or state that the disputants agree they are looking for is 'the one that can render life happy [*eudaimon*] for all human beings' (11d5). From the beginning, then, the subject of enquiry is limited specifically to the human realm.[75] Philebus' original claim – as Socrates states it, and Philebus confirms – was supposed to apply to 'all creatures'. Protarchus readily, if perhaps unwittingly, agrees that what we are really concerned with is not necessarily what makes any creature at all happy, but rather with what makes human beings happy.[76]

The second preliminary agreement involves a hastily sketched 'plan B', which shortly assumes increasing significance. Socrates asks,

> What if it should turn out that there is another possession, better than either of them [i.e. pleasure or knowledge]? Would not the result be that, if it turns out to be more closely related to pleasure, we will both lose out against the life that firmly possesses that, but the life of pleasure will defeat the life of knowledge . . . And if it is closer to knowledge, then knowledge wins over pleasure, and pleasure loses? (11d10-12a5)

This proposal anticipates the subsequent revelation of the insufficiency of both candidates, and discovery of a third candidate that is at any rate *better* than either of the original proposals.[77] There is, of course, still much that is vague in the notion of being 'more closely related', for there are all kinds of different ways in which two things might be closely related or otherwise. The exploration of these varieties of 'familial resemblance' and relations runs as an undercurrent throughout the dialogue, culminating towards the end of the dialogue, when we find ourselves standing 'on the very threshold of the good and of the house of every member of its family' (64c1-2).[78] For now, it serves at least as a starting point for where to go if both advocates are disappointed in their ambitions. In addition, there are still further refinements of the nature of the object of the search implicit in this second agreement. We now have it stated clearly that we are not just looking for that state or possession of the soul which makes a human being well-off – we are looking for something which makes a whole human life good. The *life* containing the conjectured third element would win out over the *lives* of pleasure and of knowledge. It will turn out to be a direct consequence of looking for the good in a *human* life that – humans being the kind of beings we are – one will have to look in terms of a life, and not a moment. To inquire into the state of soul capable of rendering a

human being happy is, as will become increasingly apparent, to pose a question about human lives.

VII. The Opening Skirmish

With the bold claim that 'as to pleasure, I know that it is complex' (12c3), Socrates kicks off the first stretch of argument.[79] This portion of the discussion revolves around Socrates' claim and goes to the heart of the issue under dispute between himself and his interlocutor. For everything turns on what sort of thing pleasure is, what sort of complexity it may or may not admit, what sort of unity it can lay claim to and how.

Protarchus merely insists upon the unity of pleasure. But the simple unity thesis will prove open to two alternatives, one vacuous and the other plain false. The false view contends that the unity of pleasure rests in the feeling – what makes these several instances of pleasure all count as *pleasure* is that, however they came about, they *feel* the same (in the way that, say, scratching or pinching might be defined by how it feels). Because pleasures seem so plainly to defy this sort of unity, the simple unity theorist might retreat and contend that, while the sensations may differ in any number of radical ways, pleasures are simply defined as whatever sensations are in fact welcomed or desired by the person experiencing them. This is the vacuous construal of the simple unity thesis – vacuous because it both demands and makes impossible an actual explanation of the unity of pleasure.[80] Because he sees no need for an explanation of pleasure's unity, Protarchus seems to hold to a theory of undifferentiated pleasure – pleasure is just that generic 'mmm....'-feeling that attaches to various human activities; any variety to be found is merely circumstantial.[81]

According to Socrates, on the other hand, the variations in pleasure cut so deeply into the feeling itself, that it is at least a question whether there is any genuine unity to

the notion or phenomenon of pleasure at all. The unity of pleasure *cannot* consist in their all *feeling* the same, because they don't. But it also cannot be explained simply by saying that, however they feel and wherever they come from, they all feel pleasant, for that is no explanation at all, but merely an assertion that there is some one thing, pleasure, despite appearances.

In his first attempt to make his point, Socrates remarks that the debauched person is pleased no less than the temperate man who takes pleasure in his temperance. And 'again, we say that a fool, though full of foolish opinions and hopes, gets pleasure, but likewise a wise man takes pleasure in his wisdom' (12d2-3). An innocuous, common-sense claim, and a difficult one to deny. Different people engaged in radically different activities might each experience pleasure. This simple observation seems to (but does not) support the conception of pleasure as utterly generic, as always 'most like itself' (12e1) regardless of its 'heritage', the cause or circumstances surrounding any experience of pleasure. This Generic Theory of Pleasure, as we might call it, makes hedonism a thorough-goingly democratic doctrine – pleasure is available to anyone, wherever he or she may happen to find it; pleasure is not even prejudiced across species, since the same 'mmm....'-feeling is accessible to any living being. It is even egalitarian about its objects – any pleasure, as pleasure, is just as pleasant as any other, regardless of its 'cause'. Indeed, this 'democratic' aspect of pleasure is part of what makes hedonism so attractive to some, so repellent to others. And it is this understanding of pleasure that makes it a natural place for the consequentialist to look, when trying to propose that end towards which everything else is a means, or with respect to which anything else acquires whatever value it has.

But the fact that pleasure arises in all sorts of diverse experiences does not necessarily imply the Generic Theory of Pleasure. In fact, even the bare terms of the

discussion thus far make such a notion of pleasure appear rather implausible. While we might readily agree that different activities bring pleasure to different people, it might be difficult to maintain that the debauched person, say, is feeling the same thing – his soul is in the same state – when engaging in debauchery, that the temperate man feels when he delights in moderate behaviour. Spelled out clearly in terms of 'the condition of the soul' – which Socrates does not do – the position seems rather an awkward one to defend; yet, Protarchus does so unabashedly. 'Well, yes, Socrates,' he replies, 'the pleasures come from opposite things. But *they* are not at all opposed to one another' (12d6-7).[82] This identical-state position, however, is the one Protarchus must defend, if he wants to maintain the utter unity and simplicity of pleasure. If, that is, he wants to talk about 'pleasure *qua* pleasure' and to maintain that *this* is (the) good, then he will be supposing that pleasure is something so generically uniform that the question of good and bad pleasures cannot arise, simply because there are no differences at all in pleasures and *a fortiori* no differences in worth.[83] If he once admits that there are some differences, then, as Socrates will soon make clear, the hedonist owes us an explanation, at least, of why the question of differences in value does not arise.

Does Protarchus realise what a difficult thesis he is undertaking to defend by asking rhetorically 'How could pleasure not be, of all things, most like pleasure? How could that thing not be most like itself?' (12d7-e1). Quite possibly not, for Socrates does not at first call attention to the immediate practical difficulties that might be incurred by supposing that the state of a soul pleased in a great debauch is the same state of soul arising from more refined pleasures. Instead he first takes up the nature of 'unity', in Protarchus' claim that pleasure is a single thing, and the nature of complexity or plurality, in the contested claim that pleasure is complex.[84] In this way he opens the way to deal at once with both construals of the simple unity theory of pleasure. There may be

many different ways in which something can be 'one', or have unity; and there are certainly different ways in which something can be complex, varied, or otherwise lacking in complete unity in every respect. Indeed, in order to make this point – and to show Protarchus just how limited, or else ridiculous, is his defence on behalf of the utter simplicity of pleasure – Socrates introduces an illustration of one sort of complexity, one which conforms to Protarchus' description of the unity pleasure must have – that pleasure be most like itself.

> Colours certainly won't differ insofar as every one of them is a colour; but we all know that black is not only different from white but is in fact its very opposite. And shape is most like shape in the same way. For shape is all one in genus, but some of its parts are absolutely opposite to one another and others differ in innumerable ways. (12e3-13a2)[85]

While Socrates is trying to exhibit a clear example of a complex unity, and to point out certain features and possibilities which any such unity must have, Plato is not thereby establishing an extra-special sort of unity, quite different from the relation of species to their genera. Colours and shape aptly show, just as Dachshund and Rotweiler might, the strength (or weakness) of Protarchus' defence of the unity of pleasure. The point is not so much that Protarchus is *wrong* in asserting that pleasure has *some* sort of unity; it is just that the minimal unity thus won does not prevent pleasures from differing so radically in kind that they might actually be 'opposed' to one another.[86]

The notion of opposition is of particular interest here, and recalls similar claims about certain shapes being the opposite of one another, made by Socrates in the *Meno* (74b-77a). Ordinarily today, opposites are thought of as contraries, mutually exclusive pairs – on/off, hot/cold, wet/dry – usually pairs which indicate different extremes of a single spectrum. With colours, however, there is no such linear spectrum;[87] certainly

with respect to shapes it is hopeless to try to think of them as related to one another on some linear spectrum, ranging from, say, circle to square – would triangle, then, or perhaps hexegon, fall somewhere in the middle, be less 'opposed' to circle and square than either of them are to each other? Especially because Plato reserves another place and other language for expressing complementary pairs,[88] the most reasonable understanding of his talk here of 'opposition' – whether among colours, shapes, or pleasure – is the somewhat less loaded notion of 'mutual exclusivity'. Moreover, this fits well with the occasion that gave rise to Socrates' remarks on colour and shape in the first place: it is not just that the debauched person derives pleasure from things different from those that the temperate person enjoys; the enjoyment of viciousness actively prevents the enjoyment of temperance. If this is the case, then there is good sense in Socrates pressing the point of their difference – for if pleasures can exclude each other in this way, and all pleasures are good, then hard choices (that is, choices with consequences) will have to be made, for which the hedonist can provide no means of coming to a decision.[89]

A further curious feature of the example Plato chooses often goes unnoticed, although it is pertinent to assessing the strength and point of the argument, as well as the weakness or validity of Protarchus' ultimate capitulation. Although shapes differ in kind, as do colours, and although each of their kinds excludes, and thus is opposed to, all other shapes or colours, there is no obvious differentiation in value amongst the kinds. Whatever common mystical associations there might be around the notion of the 'perfect circle', still the quality of any particular shape is not determined by its proximity to circularity. A perfect square had best not resemble a circle in the least, and a triangle is neither a failed instantiation of a square or circle, nor is it a better or worse rendering of 'shape'. This much is brought out in the *Meno* (74b-c). 'Good' and 'bad' are not

differentiae of colours or of shapes. And neither are they, for the hedonist, possible differentiae of pleasures. Socrates assumes that anyone holding that pleasure is the good must therefore agree with his own view, that goodness is an extra quality attaching to pleasure. Only if that is the case must the hedonist identify 'the common element in the good and bad pleasures that allows [one] to call them all good' (13b4-5). But for the hedonist, this demand gains no purchase; for he does not claim that goodness attaches to pleasures, but that pleasure is (what it is to be) good. Naturally, as Protarchus protests, no one 'who begins by laying it down that pleasure is the good. . .will accept it when you say that some pleasures are good but others are bad' (13b6-e2). And so he is thoroughly justified in rejecting Socrates' formulation of the question. However, Socrates' point does not carry such heavy implications as he boasts, as is clear from the examples he chooses of shapes and colour, which are wholly resistant to analysis in terms of good or bad. In discussing painting, I might claim of either colour or shape or both that it is *the* good – that to be striven for, and in virtue of which any painting is good – without necessarily committing myself to the view that certain shapes or colours are inherently good, while others are bad, or to the view that there is something else, besides being colours, which all colours have in common and which accounts for their goodness. Bizarre as the claim may be, if I am arguing that colours are the good in painting, then it suffices that they be colours in order to explain the goodness of any particular colours.[90]

So it would not be fatal to the hedonist view for Protarchus to concede that pleasure *may* come in kinds, and kinds which are mutually exclusive. Varied and 'opposed' as they may be, all pleasures are still pleasant – so some unity of genus is preserved – and all pleasures are equally good, just as all shapes or all colours are equally good. *How* good they are would remain the bone of contention between the discussion partners. But not only is such a concession not fatal to the hedonist camp – in

its less over-stated form, it is a concession which it is almost impossible *not* to grant. Indeed, in his final attempt to refuse to see the point, Protarchus becomes downright obstreperous. 'But you will grant,' Socrates asks, 'that they are *unlike* each other and that some are opposites?' (13c3-4); to which Protarchus responds, 'Not insofar as they are pleasures' – as if it had ever been Socrates' contention that the 'opposition' in pleasures resulted in any of them not being pleasures at all. *Of course*, 'insofar as they are pleasures' all pleasures are equally pleasures; this is not the question, and for Protarchus to pretend at this stage that it is can only be stubborn and deliberate blindness. Hence Socrates' chastening question, 'Don't the examples just given make the slightest impression on us?' (13c7). Protarchus knows very well that enjoying the pleasures of foolish fancies excludes the possibility of enjoying wise discernment, and that he will have a hard time of it if he tries to argue that these two states – or the state of the profligate and that of the saint – not only *feel* the same, but are indeed identical in every respect, even if only at the moment of experiencing pleasure. Thus when Socrates finally elicits agreement from Protarchus by showing how his own candidate is subject to a similar pluralisation, so that both candidates with have to face equally whatever dangers are incurred by pluralisation (13e-14a), the agreement is not merely the ill-gotten gain of cheap trickery on Socrates' part. Protarchus ought to have allowed the point to go through in the first place, and it was only Socrates' misleading description of the consequences of such an admission that led Protarchus to stubbornly refuse to entertain the obviously common-sense notion. Although he does not agree *when* he should, Protarchus does agree to what he should, given the arguments presented, and to no more than that. He has not, for example, taken upon himself the duty of identifying some extra quality in virtue of which all pleasures are good, and he does not have to. Socrates, for his part, does not press the point by insisting immediately on an account such as the one

he had threatened was necessary at 13b. He has not really shown, yet, that the demand for such an account is legitimate.

But if neither character grants, nor takes as granted, anything beyond some very modest claims about kinds of pleasure, then Plato has chosen a round-about way of bringing the discussion to this point, after all. *Why?* In the first place, by having and taking the opportunity to offer up his own candidate to his own questions, Socrates reveals the prevalence and magnitude of the question of unity and complexity. If both candidates, different as they are, are potentially problematic because of their plurality, then the problem is not one special to pleasure, but rather ranges over the whole of human life. There are good reasons for considering the questions of unity and plurality on their own, as one step towards answering the question of the good in human life – for we are forced thereby to think about the method we use in thinking about these things, and in so doing are compelled to reflect upon the normativity implicit in judgement and discourse. This, I shall try to show, is a central lesson of the dialogue as a whole. But its centrality would only come out clearly if Socrates has some excuse for opening up his own candidate to scrutiny as ruthlessly as he has opened up Protarchus'.[91]

In addition, we have in the space of a few brief pages models of two very different types of possible conversation. On the one hand, we see Socrates being as crassly assertive as possible – leaping immediately to the strongest conclusions upon the weakest grounds – when he describes to Protarchus what danger threatens his argument if he concedes that pleasure is variegated. Protarchus, in response, becomes intractable and uncooperative. In the face of this, Socrates suddenly pursues a different tactic. Rather than open aggression, he adopts a more congenial tone, shows the apparent vulnerabilities in his own position, and offers to see through whatever difficulties may arise together with Protarchus – 'For we are not contending here out of love of victory

for my suggestion to win or for yours. We ought to act together as allies in support of the truest one' (14b5-7). The shared respect and desire for the truth will echo throughout the dialogue.[92] For the present, we are being presented here with two alternative styles of discussion, and with a decisive choice of the latter over the former.[93] The first, contentious style, besides being a possible glimpse into what may have gone on between Socrates and Philebus 'before' the dialogue opens, is obviously reminiscent of what we do know came before the *Philebus*, in other Platonic dialogues. Open hostility, tenacity to one's own thesis in the face of all opposition, can only end in futility – as, in fact, the *Gorgias*, for example, does.

By the end of the dialogue, we should have a deeper understanding of what it means to value truth, and how this can in turn inform a notion of integrity. And we should have an explanation of why integrity can be so vital to human beings and human lives. It is by insisting upon the connections between metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of mind that we can arrive at a robust sense of persons and their value that does not threaten to dissolve into egoism. But in order to see this, we will first explore the most basic demands of intelligibility, which condition our orientation towards truth, and then examine the consequences of repudiating these demands.

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[1] Or 'Mr. Loveboy' as Gosling [1975] has it (pg. x); 'Liebhaber von Jünglingen' in D. Frede [1997] 95.

[2] A. E. Taylor [1956], pg. 12, argues against those who would have Philebus be an older man; D. Frede [1997], pg. 94, takes him to be a 'blasé young man'.

[3] In fact, the only indication we are given of the age of any character in the dialogue is Protarchus' playful threatening of Socrates at 16a4-6: 'Careful, Socrates, don't you see what a crowd we are and that we are all young? And are you not afraid that we will gang up against you with Philebus if you insult us?' From this it seems likely that Protarchus and the unnamed audience members are appreciably younger than Socrates; it seems that Philebus is not counted among the 'we' who are 'all young', but this does not confirm that Philebus is also older. He is just the representative of the opposition, a figure round which dissent might rally.

[4] For interest in what Greek literature might contribute to moral philosophy, see especially Nussbaum [1986]; and also Nietzsche [1872] and [1873]; Williams [1993].

[5] Anscombe [1997]; Foot [1978]; MacIntyre [1981] who, following Anscombe, argues that modern moral philosophy rests on a mistake.

[6] See, for example, Murdoch [1956]; Winch [1972], esp. 'Moral Integrity'; Diamond [1991], esp. 'Having a Rough Story about What Moral Philosophy Is'.

[7] Cf. Williams [1981], 'Persons, Character and Morality'.

[8] Whether it is indeed *one* attempt will be addressed briefly in the concluding chapter.

[9] A project such as that offered by Taylor [1989] is of a sort that tries to grant full weight to persons and their world in thinking about ethics. Cf. also Rhees [1999]; Hursthouse [1999]; Nehamas [1998]; McDowell [1998]; Gaita [1990]; Murdoch [1957] and [1970] esp. 'On "God" and "Good"'.

[10] Cf. Sedley [1998].

[11] I would count, for example, Irwin's account of Plato's ethics amongst those which manage to lead the contemporary moral philosopher to suppose that Plato has nothing very interesting or relevant to add to our discussions of ethics today (Irwin [1995]).

[12] Articulated to great rhetorical effect by, for example, Nussbaum [1986]. On knowingness and its consequences, see Lear [1998].

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[13] Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* is probably the most (in)famous of these accounts; but he is not alone in supposing that the kind of rationalist and universalist ideal inaugurated by Plato leads (inevitably? or at least in fact, historically) to authoritarian and totalitarian politics. For a response to this reading, see D. Frede [1996].

[14] The thought is that to the degree that Plato meant any of those extreme Socratic pronouncements seriously, he is just obviously wrong. Morality just should not be that kind of over-riding concern. One gets the impression from reading Bernard Williams on moral luck, that he takes this attitude, but I admit it is no more than an impression. Cf. also Foot [1978]; Hursthouse [1999]

[15] McDowell [1998], [1995].

[16] MacIntyre [1981], for example, seems to say as much; and it seems implicit in G. E. M. Anscombe's work in moral philosophy. (Incidentally: see also the description of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in Oxford University's *Examination Decrees*)

[17] R. F. Holland, Rush Rhees, Raimond Gaita and Peter Winch are among the few within contemporary ethics who have tried to take Plato, or at least Plato's Socrates, as having something important to contribute to the discussion. Iris Murdoch goes further in attempting to present a more wide-ranging 'Platonic' approach to thinking about ethics and aesthetics, about what matters in human life as a whole.

[18] Cf. Foot [1978], esp. 'Virtues and Vices'; on difficulties between author and character in Plato, cf. e.g. M. Frede [1996]

[19] Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre [1981]

[20] Cf. e.g. John McDowell [1998] and [1980].

[21] Cf. Rosalind Hursthouse [1999]

[22] Cf. Martha Nussbaum [1986], Williams [1973].

[23] As McDowell [1998] would have him be, and, less explicitly, MacIntyre [1981].

[24] As perhaps Hursthouse [1999] would have him be.

[25] See Arendt [1958] for a one interesting attempt to address this question. Cf. also Winch [1972].

[26] And if it *is* a genuine possibility, it must be an important one.

[27] Cf. Murdoch [1978] 'On "God" and "Good"'.

[28] Cf. Kant [1785] and [1787]. On Kant's conception of reason, see O'Neill [1992].

[29] Cf. McDowell [1998] and [1980].

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[30] Bernard Williams remarked, in a lecture before the Royal Institute of Philosophy, that flourishing for human beings is not likely to be measured by the 'shiny eye and bushy tail'. But if not that – if not in terms of physical health and fitness to survive and leave many descendants – then how *are* we to conceive of 'flourishing' when it comes to human beings?

[31] The significance of unity of a person, for example, and what makes that unity possible.

[32] Do we want a list of virtues in a treatise on ethics? Does the conception of 'proper function' beg the more interesting questions about value?

[33] Why should it be, as Aristotle claims, that we are concerned with happiness over an entire life? What is a human life that it could be considered in this way? What is the significance of reason in the entirety of our ethical lives? Is it just another capacity? If so, what makes it the most valuable one? What exactly *is* intellect, and how are the practical and theoretical sort related? Is understanding just something superimposed upon impulsive desire, in order to govern it; or might it actually affect the nature and value of those 'impulses' themselves?

[34] By, that is, responding to Aristotle's objections in *Nicomachean Ethics* I. 6, and recovering some sense of '*the* good', and the place of reason as an over-arching capacity that goes with that conception of goodness.

[35] One of the post-war critics of the Enlightenment faith in rationality might say that there is no difference, and we are foolish if we think that such a challenge is insignificant, either unimportant or easy to answer. Plato was not so foolish. Motivated to preserve universalism in ethics by developing Kant's thought, Jürgen Habermas has turned attention in precisely this direction – what makes reasonable, if not strictly 'rational' discussion possible? From this he hopes to elicit the basic maxims which we all must presume and obey in order to participate in discussion, in order to articulate a shared basis of value which is inviolable. While I find the project interesting, the devotion to 'maxims' as the primary concern of ethics limits the possibilities unnecessarily. Part of this devotion results from a faithfulness to Kant's distinction between 'right' and 'good', which is presumed to be necessary in order to preserve universalism in ethics. It is difficult within such a framework to articulate the difference between 'mere' persuasion and ideology on the one hand, and reasonable conviction on the other. This will be due, in part, to the fact that the difference lies crucially within the agent; but Kantian moral agents, so long as all particularity and personality are loaded into 'the good' and sharply distinguished from 'the right', are disturbingly elusive. I

hope to show that we are better off without presuming this distinction in the first place (although there may be some use for it *within* ethical discourse), and that Plato's somewhat different approach shows that we can conceive of an ethics that claims universal applicability without the distinction, and without falling into rank relativism.

[36] Winch [1972], in 'Moral Integrity', illustrates some of the problems with conceiving of 'morality' or 'moral philosophy' as a search for a solution to problems, or a route to resolving indecision (or justifying decisions).

[37] For discussion of the initial ambiguity of the hedonist position, see Gosling [1975], esp. pp. 139-142; also Gosling and Taylor [1982] and D. Frede [1997].

[38] It will become clear soon enough (11d5). The crux is whether these are indeed two separate questions, and if so why and what follows from this? And if these are two questions, how might they be related (if they are at all)?

[39] Cf. Gosling and Taylor [1982]

[40] Some of these issues will be clarified almost immediately. Others only become clear less explicitly, in the course of the discussion. So, at 20e it is accepted without comment that the proper terms of evaluating the competing claims of pleasure and knowledge is the context of a human life, and not primarily isolated actions, or even 'experiences'.

[41] Such as the *Symposium*, for example, or the *Phaedo*.

[42] Cf. *Euthyphro, Laches, Charmides,* or *Theaetetus*, which are quite explicit in the question they intend to address.

[43] Pleasure is treated directly from 31b to 55b, while Socrates' candidate is dealt with in just over four pages (55c-59d). We can see why Hackforth's translation and commentary originally appeared under the title *Plato's Examination of Pleasure.*

[44] The third 'proof' in *Republic* IX that the life of wisdom is much more pleasant than the life of self-indulgence, is also dedicated to 'Zeus the Saviour' (*Rep.* 583b). This is interesting because of the apparent similarity in the treatment of pleasure, and the apparent divergence in the conclusions of the two dialogues about the good life. I regret that, due to space constraints, I shall be unable to give adequate attention to the relation between the *Republic* and the *Philebus.*

[45] Hence Bury's ([1897], ix) inimitable description of the *Philebus* as 'a gnarled and knotted old oak-tree,

abounding in unexpected humps and shoots which sadly mar its symmetry as compared with the fair cypress-trees and stately pines by whose side it stands in the 'grove of Academe'. . . Beneath the difficulties of expression and peculiarity of form which mark this dialogue there is a sound core of true Platonic thought. That it is harsh and rugged in style none can deny; that it is jagged and distorted in composition is equally indisputable.' Naturally, it is just this assessment which I intend to dispute and deny.

[46] This will be addressed in Chapter 2.

[47] and indeed within the *Philebus* itself (28e-30e, 55c-54c)

[48] This will be taken up again in the final chapter.

[49] He grounds his testimony in a further two criteria – the lives of pleasure and of knowledge are each undesirable because they are insufficient and incomplete. But his judgement that they are so, and that they are undesirable, is allowed to count for anything on the basis of the third criterion of 'desirability to all who know it'.

[50] Cf. *Republic IX* (582a *ff.*) It might be useful to consider that in *Utilitarianism* John Stuart Mill uses this same technique in defence of hedonistic consequentialism. He uses the principle that only the person who has experienced ('knows', for the empiricist) two pleasures is in a position to judge their relative worth (or comparative pleasantness) in order to insist that the traditional 'higher' pleasures are in fact more choiceworthy, which is to say more *pleasant*. (Mill [1861] esp. pp. 8-11)

[51] 'Oh, dear, Protarchus, then a long discussion lies ahead of us, and not exactly an easy one either at this point'

[52] This will be addressed in Chapter 3.

[53] The significance of this peculiar but deliberate double conclusion to the project of the dialogue will be discussed in Chapter 7.

[54] Cf. Gosling's ([1975] 220) explanation of 53c-55b : 'One gets the impression that Plato had this piece to hand, was unwilling to abandon it, could not blend it in smoothly, so in desperation inserted it badly at this point.'

[55] As, for example, the explanation offered by Ryle [1966] for the absence of the Socrates character from some of the dialogues.

[56] Or, here is Poste's explanation: 'We assume the *Philebus* to have arisen from a boldly executed junction

of two originally separate dialogues.' (Quoted by Bury [1897] ix).

[57] To be discussed in Chapter 2.

[58] G. E. M. Anscombe [1997] in 'Modern Moral Philosophy' (which originally appeared in 1958) was one of the first to call attention to the issue. Iris Murdoch [1970] in 'Sovereignty of the Good' and in [1956] 'Vision and Choice in Morality' was another early voice. Peter Winch's 'Moral Integrity' (in Winch [1972]) also addresses this concern well.

[59] Cf. Cora Diamond [1991] 'Having a Rough Story about What Moral Philosophy Is'. For a certain stretch in the history of moral philosophy this question was assumed to be settled. Thus Christine Korsgaard [1996] has no qualms about assuming that the project of moral philosophy is to justify our sense of obligation (usually in the face of desires to do otherwise), and so basing *Sources of Normativity* on the attempt to respond to this challenge to morality's legitimacy.

[60] This need not be the strong claim that all of Plato's metaphysics and epistemology are ethically motivated – constructed *ad hoc* in order to justify some deeply held, if somewhat peculiar, convictions about morality and wisdom. The point is rather that many of Plato's concerns reflect upon, involve, and inter-relate with each other; there is some unity to the many investigations, and ethics is precisely the field which takes a unified overview of how diverse but related parts might be grasped as a whole.

[61] Cf. Gaita [1999], for whom it is not mere generosity of spirit to allow others to come to their own view on these matters. He argues that one distinctive feature of ethical thought is that everyone must do it for him- or herself. There is no expertise in ethical reflection; and even if someone is 'better' at it – wiser than I – I still cannot hand over responsibility for coming to a decision. Insisting on the importance of this curious fact, and of what makes it so, is central to the ethical view that comes out of the *Philebus*. This will be addressed in Chapter 7.

[62] Cf. *Gorgias* 506c *ff.*

[63] It is his elitist tendencies, and not his commitment to pleasure that make him ashamed to speak of shoemakers and the like. Although he brazenly welcomes the life of constant depletion and repletion (494a-c) because of its superlative pleasantness, he shrinks before the pleasures of scratching. For discussion of the way Callicles' competing commitments line up, see Woolf [2000].

[64] This is Socrates' charge at *Gorgias* 482b. In fairness to him, Callicles does attempt, after the fact, to stick with something his has already agreed to (e.g., *Gorgias* 495a), and this partial willingness allows the

discussion to go on for as long as it does.

[65] Cf. *Gorgias* 481d *ff.*, where Callicles' affections are divided between d*emos* of Athens and *Demos* the son of Pyrilampes.

[66] Hackforth [1945] 6 says tellingly, 'Philebus is not a real person: he is the mere embodiment of an irrational dogmatic hedonism, a Callicles without the passion.'

[67] Charles Taylor [1991] on how having a self is a matter of having 'deep' commitments, 'projects' and not just experiences. A similar point is brought out by Williams [1981]in his 'Persons, Character, and Morality'.

[68] Indeed, his inability to feel it (and feel it as a loss) is part of his loss.

[69] Or a mollusc, as it will turn out at 21c7.

[70] Callicles' lack of concern for consistency has landed him with deep commitments, none of which can be pursued without violating the others. Always doomed to act against himself in one way or another, and with no way of arbitrating between goals (nor, indeed, any reason to do so), it must be unpredictable which part of his personality will dominate from one moment to the next, and his behaviour, responses and beliefs will necessarily be erratic. He has several personalities, but no character. See Irwin [1995], Kahn [1983].

[71] Where 'mindless' contrasts with 'enlightened' or 'calculative' hedonism. A hedonist-consequentialist need not be a maximiser, and Plato knows it. But there may well not be a third alternative between the 'mindless' hedonist and the maximiser. Either we take a long view of what is best, all things considered – where 'best', in hedonist terms can only be what is most pleasant (pleasure is the *only* measure of value) – or we take no long view, and accept whatever comes to us as pleasant, rejecting anything that is unpleasant here and now.

[72] D. Frede [1996]2, points out in passing, that by setting up the discussion as a debate between pleasure and knowledge, Plato thereby entirely excludes certain kinds of things – 'external' goods, such as wealth and honour – from consideration as a viable candidate for either the good in life or the source of goodness in life (whichever it is it turns out we are discussing – each will come up in its turn). While this is hardly surprising, we might nonetheless pause for a moment to consider the grounds on which such goods do not even make it onto the first ballot. One argument against external goods might be that they are not under our control, whereas we like to think that whether or not we are living a good life is as much under our

control as possible, and indeed more 'up to us' than anything else. If this, however, is the reason for their exclusion, then we must build into Plato's conception of the good life the very strong (and quite unjustified) presupposition that to the extent that it is good, it is also unshakeable – and conversely, if something is not reliable, then for that very reason, it cannot qualify as good or the source of goodness. While it might turn out that, on Plato's view, the good life is in fact so solid – and while we might welcome this fact – it seems hardly fair to make something so inconsistent with our experience and counter to our intuitions into a *criterion* for the possible goodness of any good thing. Moreover, even for Plato, imperturbability itself will only be a good thing if the state one is in is itself already a good one – and good according to some other criterion than merely its resistance to change. It is true that, for Plato, perfect things will tend to remain incorruptibly in their perfect state, while imperfect things will eventually change, losing whatever goodness they'd had. Still, the flagrant tyrant who remained incorruptibly vicious throughout his entire life would hardly, by virtue of his remaining in a constant state, count as a worthy exemplar of a good man, leading a good life. Incidental conjunctions may happen not to change, without thereby becoming good – as will become clear later in the dialogue, something more is needed in order to get value into the equation. More to the point, however, if external goods were so easily, and on that ground, excluded from consideration, then Socrates could make very short work of the hedonist indeed. All of the dissipated pleasures of debauchery are admitted even by their fans to be unstable; even the most innocuous pleasures of food, drink and sleep are not only unstable in themselves – in that they lead to their own destruction – they, like all supposedly pleasant things, cannot be relied upon to give the pleasure anticipated, or to be available when desired. Because most (if not all) pleasures depend on some object of pleasure, one would have to be a very Epicurean hedonist or else be thrown back even more severely than before upon the chance vicissitudes of a world almost wholly out of our control. If stability, reliability and control are to be taken for granted as the criteria of a good life, rather than possible incidental features of it, then the argument against the hedonist is over before it begins – or else neither Philebus nor Protarchus is the hedonist Plato should have Socrates talk to. But if we cannot have these as our criteria for identifying anything good, then it cannot be for lack of them that the external goods are excluded from serious consideration in the discussion of the good life. The other common argument against such 'goods', then, is simply the observation that they are not always accompanied by happiness, and that even when happiness does come along with the attainment of money or success, it does not necessarily come in direct or

constant proportion to the goods attained. A rich and famous man may well be unhappy and dissatisfied, while his poorer cousin of no particular repute may be quite content with his life. Everyday experience tells against external goods being sufficient for, or a measure of, happiness. What is more, this very banal reason for excluding them from consideration fits well with the criteria for goodness mentioned explicitly later in the dialogue. Health, wealth, beauty and fame are not sufficient for making a life good, and even a good enough life which had these things might be made still better by some further element (each and all of the external goods are 'incomplete'), and none of these goods is desirable to all those capable of knowing and having them.

[73] For some *hexis* or *diathesis* of the *psyche*. I will not be concerned in what follows with what the difference between these two might be. A 'possession of the soul', however, should be understood as something internal to the soul (a way a soul has of being, perhaps), not as some external and independent object owned by it.

[74] What sort of thing a soul is, what kinds of states it may be capable of being in, and what sorts of things it might be able to possess are still, of course, shadowy issues to be tacked down by further discussion. Cf. Chapters 3 and 4.

[75] If this is so, we might begin to worry about what plurality, if any, is being introduced into the notion of 'goodness' by assuming that the good for humans cannot or should not be dealt with within (and posterior to) a discussion of the good for all living creatures. It may seem we have suddenly relativised our conception of goodness – good for humans, good, for pigs, good for men, good for women, and so forth. In fact, we have re-oriented the direction we should look for the unity of a broader conception of goodness – good for humans does not refer us to the broader category of objects ('good for living creatures') but rather to the more general concept of normativity ('goodness as such').

[76] It may still turn out, of course, that pleasure – or whatever good is found – is (the) good for all living beings; but that would be more of an incidental feature of the state being sought, rather than a requirement or criterion for identifying the good state or possession.

[77] It also anticipates the closely following avowal (14b5) that the point of the dramatically staged contest is not that either candidate 'win', but that the most worthy candidate take the day.

[78] Following Hackforth [1945] and D. Frede [1993] in keeping the *tes tou toioutou* bracketed by Burnet.

[79] He makes a point about not being nearly so bold when it comes to making claims about the gods. This

contrasts Socrates' humility with the arrogance of the hedonist, who has no qualms about asserting that Aphrodite's true name is 'Pleasure'. There is, however, more than this involved in Socrates' attitude towards the divine, although not much is made of it here. (This will be explored in Chapter 3.)

[80] It would be interesting to explore why the vacuous unity thesis is so dissatisfying. One point would be that, unless there is some unity in desirable sensations, it is not really a 'unity thesis' at all. Another would be that, defining pleasure in terms of desire in this way makes pleasure utterly inaccessible to reasoning, theorising, understanding. It has been pushed into the realm of the unintelligible. In the context of ethical discussions, it is particularly dissatisfying because, while it makes pleasure the object of desire, it insists on resting with this descriptive point, closing down the space from which to discuss what *should* be desired.

[81] There is danger of Aristotle's 'epiphenomenal' account of pleasure going in this direction and it would be interesting to draw out what, if anything, preserves it from this.

[82] Incidentally, this claim, that 'pleasure insofar as it is pleasure' is always the same is surprisingly common, and the intuition of its plausibility is largely responsible for the attraction of many hedonist, consequentialist, and even anti-hedonist arguments. How this works itself through different views on the proper place of pleasure in a well-lived human life will be addressed much later in the dialogue, when talk turns to 'false' pleasures (31b *ff.*). (Chapters 4 and 5)

[83] Again, the alternative would be to fall back on the vacuous rendering of the unity thesis. Pleasures are just whatever sensations are welcome, and pains are whatever sensations are unwelcome. Having defined pleasure in terms of desire, how will desire now be defined? As impulse (like in a steam engine)? For what? If we follow this line of thought, it is no wonder that desires came to be seen as alien invaders. Plato takes on the consequences of this approach to pleasure, if anywhere in the *Philebus*, in the 'mollusc'-argument against mindless hedonism. (This 'Trial of Lives' at 20b-23a will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5).

[84] Protarchus' insistence on the unity of pleasure might look familiar: in the *Meno*, it was Socrates who was insisting on unity, the unity of virtue. By examining the implications of 'unity' in the *Philebus*, Plato shows that it is not simply a question of Socrates getting his own back. It is precisely because pleasure as much as virtue might be called 'one' and 'many' that the question of *how* unities encompass plurality becomes a pressing one.

[85] This suggestive example of a complex unity is intriguing in many respects; among these, however is not,

I think, an elucidation – inadvertent or otherwise – of some 'elusive difference' (Dancy[1984]) between the unity of species with respect to their genus, and the unity of 'determinates' with respect to their proper 'determinables' (Cf. also Benitez [1989] 49-50). There is, according to Dancy, a subtle difference in the way species of cats form the genus 'cat', and the way various colours comprise the genus 'colour' – a difference which has to do with the fact that it is part and parcel of being any one colour that it excludes every other colour. While this makes good sense of Socrates' talk of colours and shapes as 'opposites', it seems hardly to distinguish a particular class of complex unity, different from natural kinds, such as cats and dogs. It is part and parcel of what it is to be a dog, that any given species, or instance of a particular species, excludes the possibility of that dog (or kind of dog) being any other species. It is because Dachshund is a species of dog that it does not admit under any circumstances of being at the same time a Rotweiler. To suppose that the two are not mutually exclusive, or that there was some dog or kind of dog which somehow managed to escape being any particular species of dog whatsoever, is to mistake the relationship that species of dog have to their genus.

[86] As Socrates sophistically remarks, it would follow from Protarchus' line that 'the most unlike thing is of all things most *like* the most unlike' (13d4-5).

[87] Although perhaps, as Dancy [1984] suggests, the Greek colour scheme imposed one.

[88] Hotter and colder, fast and slow, and so forth are discussed as belonging to the first ontological kind introduced at 24a *ff*.

[89] Suppose I must now calculate the 'amount' of pleasure afforded by folly by subtracting out all the pleasure I am missing out on by not being wise – a very difficult hedonic calculus, indeed, especially since the more we try to entertain posing such questions, the more it looks like a choice between apples and oranges, and not a mere assessment of quantity.

[90] This does not, of course, explain or justify the original equation. If we wanted to say that not colour as such, but certain uses of colour were responsible for the quality of a painting, then one would have to look to the art of painting – its history, its essence, if it has one – and to beauty, for an explanation. This point will be brought out in the methodological remarks Socrates offers, and in the analysis of pleasure.

[91] This will be addressed in Chapter 6.

[92] As will the making of alliances (*summachein* at 14b7) between parties supporting quite different positions. Cf. 30d8 (discussed in Chapter 3, section II) and 44d7 (discussed in Chapter 5, section XII).

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[93] In fact, we are given three, if we count Philebus' sullen silence as one option of a way a conversation may go. In this, we are given a mirror image of the styles of philosophical conversation canvassed in the *Gorgias*. The painful slide from friendly disagreement to outright disagreeable uncooperativeness in the move from Gorgias to Callicles happens rapidly in reverse, within the first three pages of the *Philebus*, as our discussion with the uncooperative Philebus is brought to an end, in favour of discussion with the partisan Protarchus. Protarchus is then quickly persuaded to be not quite as partisan as all that, but to prefer truth to victory.

Chapter 2

Limits of Understanding

I. The Problem and the Agenda – a Preliminary Sketch

Every so often, another attempt is made to marry up *Philebus* 15a-20c, the 'methodological passage', with *Philebus* 23-27, the 'metaphysical passage', and at the same time to weave these two into the fabric of the dialogue as a whole.[1] The perplexities aroused by the *Philebus* begin when, amid the familiar Socratic antagonism to hedonism, Socrates strays into a general discussion of methodology. No sooner has he clarified the appropriate method for any inquiry, however (16b-20a), than the method is abruptly dismissed as unnecessary, and talk of hedonism resumed (20b). Only three pages later (23c), hedonism is in its turn dropped from view, and the language of the methodological passage is taken up again, this time in an elaborate discussion of ontology (23c-27c). Only after this does pleasure finally return as the explicit topic of the discussion (31b), and hedonism is at length and in detail laid to rest as a viable alternative to rationalism in constituting a good human life.

These abrupt turns in the discussion are largely responsible for the tendency to treat the *Philebus* as an ill-fitting heap of left-over philosophical points that Plato was keen to make, but for which he could find no other place.[2] In keeping with this 'patchwork' view of the *Philebus*, this late dialogue has often had its 'philosophical passages' – that is, the methodology at 15 *ff.*, and the ontology at 23 *ff.* – mined in order to support more grand theories of Plato's development, or of Plato's metaphysical views.[3] More recently, increasing attention has been devoted to trying to preserve the integrity of the dialogue by

reading each passage in the context of the whole dialogue. In these attempts, it is often the 'philosophical' bits which prove most recalcitrant. The primary aim of any reading that proposes to respect the unity of the dialogue is to show how the convoluted twists and turns constitute one single line of argument, and in fact one which could scarcely be better put together. It is this aim which I propose to pursue.

The first self-consciously 'philosophical' passage to be considered, 14c to 20a, describes a method of inquiry, given us by the gods, through which 'everything in any field of art that has ever been discovered has come to light' (16c2-3). This is also presented as the proper solution to serious problems about unity and plurality – the sort of problem that might arise from the claim that pleasure and knowledge, or man and goodness, are both one and many. The second 'philosophical' passage, from 23b to 27c, purports to classify exhaustively everything there is by kind, so that later pleasure and knowledge can be identified quite generally as to the *kind* of thing each is. Both passages make mention of *peras* (limit) and *apeiron* (unlimitedness, indefiniteness, indeterminacy). But these apparent terms of art seem not to have the same meaning in each case. And if the terminology is not used consistently, it is difficult to see what Plato is up to. What any reading must confront, therefore, is the fact that we seem to have a philosophical method advocated in its own right, and then discarded; and that Plato introduces technical terms of art that seem not to permit of any consistent reading, although Socrates seems blithely to overlook any possible inconsistency or even variability in their meaning.[4]

One strategy for preserving the unity of the dialogue is to argue that the method introduced at 16c as a gift from the gods is indeed the method Socrates later employs in his lengthy inquiry into the nature of pleasure and of knowledge. Although Socrates claims that failure to use the method leaves one in boundless ignorance (17e), some have denied that it is actually put into active service in the dialogue,[5] while others argue that it plays only a

very limited role in establishing the four-fold division of all beings at 23 *ff.*[6] Although I think this view mistaken, I will not pursue directly the question of how the course of the rest of the dialogue is or is not directed according to the method outlined at 16c *ff.* It is important, however, not to assume that we already know what it would be for an inquiry to be guided by the method bequeathed us by the gods. In particular, we need not and should not assume that the method introduced in the *Philebus* is the same one (whatever that is) that the young Socrates is put through at the hands of the Eleatic stranger,[7] and that turns up so many Sophists in the dialogue by that name.[8] We need not be wedded to the idea that Plato here (or ever) is primarily concerned with genus-species division trees, more appropriate perhaps to Aristotle's concerns.[9] In fact, I think we shall find that Plato recommends something far more flexible and sophisticated – as well he should, if he is going to claim that by this one method *everything* known has come to light (16c2).[10]

Instead of looking at the question of the application of the Divine Method in the dialogue as a whole, I will pursue a different strategy for laying bare the threads of continuity running through the *Philebus*. I hope, by focusing on the terms *peras* and *apeiron*, introduced in the methodology and invoked again in the metaphysics of 23 *ff.*, to provide a window into Plato's epistemology and philosophy of mind, as well as the method and ontology appropriate to these. I will try to show that not only can the two different appearances of this pair of technical terms be reconciled with each other, but also that this can be done in such a way that both the methodology and the ontology deal with themes of central concern to the dialogue as a whole, and thus play a crucial role in discrediting hedonism in favour of a distinctive sort of rationalism.

There are three inter-related obstacles to reading the *peras* and *apeiron* of the methodology as consistent with the 'limit' and 'unlimited' of the four-fold ontology. The first is the inclination to read 'limit' and 'unlimited' in the first passage as somehow or

another identical with the 'one and many' Socrates is endeavouring to clarify. Some identify limit straightforwardly with 'one' and unlimited with 'many';[11] some take limit to indicate 'the one and limitedly many' as opposed to the unlimited and the indefinitely many.[12] A second, possibly related, obstacle is the conviction that the 'indefinite' is the indefinitely many sensible particulars, and that the Divine Method of the *Philebus* is therefore a solution to the Parmenidean problems of 'participation'. A final obstacle to a unified reading arises from the tendency to overlook the ontological overtones in the first dramatic introduction of *peras* and *apeiron*. None of these interpretative moves is either helpful or necessary. By showing this, I hope to remove them as obstacles to seeing Plato here embarked on one single project in the *Philebus*, and to indicate how these separate but related discussions of method, knowledge, and structured relations of parts and wholes complement each other in their contribution to that project.

II. The Divine Method and its Objects

A central concern in coming to understand the method advocated by Socrates is to clarify which sort of objects it is supposed to be appropriate for. Some suppose that the methodology is a discussion – primarily, exclusively, or at least in part – of sensible particulars, and their participation in Forms.[13] We shall see, however, that it is just to the extent that the discussion of *peras* and *apeiron* is taken to involve reference to sensible particulars that reconciling the meaning of the terms here with their later use will prove impossible.

In what follows, I shall argue that the most promising way of understanding the unified purpose of the methodology and the metaphysics is to take both to be working primarily, if not exclusively, at the level of types.[14] It is with different kinds within some one kind of thing that the method, and the *Philebus* generally, is most concerned. This

approach is significantly less contentious with respect to the later passage, which divides 'everything that actually exists now in the universe' (23c3) into four kinds. With respect to the first passage, however, it can be virtually impossible, without a very forced reading, to avoid the introduction of sensible particulars into the discussion. Yet it is, in part, the insistence that sensible particulars are the concern of the method that leads to the perceived tension between the two passages. To opt for the alternative route to reconciliation – that is, to argue that both passages are primarily concerned with sensible particulars – is, however, to disconnect the concerns of these passages from those of the dialogue as a whole. For the overarching aim of the *Philebus* is not to worry about describing or identifying particular instances of pleasure, or particular good human lives; its goal is rather to find the general nature of pleasure and its kinds – 'whether there are kinds of pleasures or not, and how many there are, and of what sort they are' (19b2-3) – in order to demonstrate that these cannot be the same as the basic requirements for, nor the sources of, all goodness in any human life.

II (A). The Need for a Method of Inquiry

In the opening of the dialogue, after a bit of squabbling, Socrates has finally wrung from his hedonist interlocutor the concession that pleasures, pleasant though they may be, may yet differ in kind. He asks Protarchus to consider that the pleasures of the temperate man differ greatly from those of the foolish man. When this fails fully to persuade the hedonist that pleasures come in various kinds, Socrates offers the further analogies of different colours and shapes, which are still the same kind of thing, although they are quite opposite to one another.[15] Finally eliciting agreement by allowing that his own preferred candidate for the good in life – knowledge, judgement, intellect, true belief – also comes in differing kinds, Socrates seizes the opportunity to begin spelling out the implications of this

claim. He suggests to Protarchus that they

> give even stronger support to this assertion. . . which somehow has an amazing nature. For that the many are one and the one many are amazing statements, and can easily be disputed, whichever side of the two one may want to defend. (14c1-2; 14c7-10)

Thus Plato introduces an intricate bit of methodology and epistemology, and eventually along with that the pair 'limit' (*peras*) and 'unlimited' or 'indeterminate' (*apeiron*).

The amazing claims about unity and plurality are first illustrated by pointing to some puzzles that seem to result from identifying 'one' and 'many'. But the first of the puzzles is introduced by Protarchus only to be dismissed by Socrates as 'childish' (14d7) and a 'great hindrance to discussion' (14d7) – thereby echoing the impudent dismissal of Zeno's puzzles by the precocious Socrates of the *Parmenides* (129b-d). But in marked contrast to the earnestness characteristic of the Socrates of earlier dialogues, Plato here has Socrates reply by offering up his own example of a 'trivial' one-and-many puzzle. No more worthy than Protarchus' problem

> is the following quibble: when someone who first distinguishes a person's limbs and parts asks your agreement that all these parts are identical with that unity, but then exposes you to ridicule because of the monstrosities you have to admit, that the one is many and indefinitely many, and again that the many are only one thing. (14d8-e4)

II (B). What Makes a Puzzle Trivial?

Before turning to consider what the genuine problems of unity and plurality might be, we should take a moment to consider briefly what makes the trivial puzzles trivial. The scope of the puzzles is so deliberately specified, and the response to it so unfamiliar, that recourse to other dialogues has been, by and large (and with the exception of the

Parmenides), of only minimal help in understanding what Plato is trying to do here. Certainly the first sort of childish riddle, if not the second as well, is likewise dismissed in the *Parmenides*.[16] There, however, it is disdained by a young Socrates, in confident possession of that metaphysical trump card, the Forms. The unity of sensible particulars is not threatened by their plurality because there are pristinely unconflicted objects, Forms, which – in virtue of their own unambiguous nature – can account for complexity, and guarantee the unity of particulars.[17] It will be tempting, then, to assume that if the same puzzles are here too trivial, then this must be because the older and wiser Socrates is still holding on to the Theory of Forms, and this time with so much self-assurance, that he need not even mention it in order for Protarchus readily to concede that his original worries were not really all that bothersome, after all.[18]

One problem with this assumption, though, is that the young Socrates' early confidence that there could be such pure objects is rather quickly eroded by the distinguished Parmenides in the first part of the dialogue; and then the principal suppositions necessary if any such objects are to exist undergo exhaustive scrutiny in the lengthy second part of the dialogue. It is the very existence of middle period Forms, and their ability to do the explanatory work for which they were designed, which endure sustained attack in the *Parmenides*; and it is simply unclear whether anything of that theory survives the attack.[19]

If he does not have recourse to the theory of Forms, Plato may now suppose that such riddles are no longer problematic because – like the mud and hair of the *Parmenides* – such cases simply are what they seem to be, and do not admit of further explanation.[20] Or he may suppose that, since particulars are unknowable anyway,[21] *any* word-traps we might construct around them could only be trivial. Or, he may indeed suppose that – insofar as such arguments are put forward seriously by those capable of regulated discussion – such puzzles are easily resolved by reference to some kind of non-sensible entities; but it is not

yet clear just what these entities are. This would be the much more controversial question, but once it *is* settled, the solutions to problems about sensibles are just obvious.

We might also recall that we need not assume that the dissolution of both of the non-puzzles will be the same, at least in details.[22] Protarchus' puzzle, for example, might be resolved in part at least by adding the appropriate qualifiers; Socrates' puzzle, on the other hand, might be resolved by denying the initial premise, that the parts are identical with the whole. All the same, these simple answers as they stand do not explain what does the work in these one-many puzzles that was done before by Forms, or else why that work is no longer necessary.

II (C). Are the Non-trivial Puzzles about Forms?

Socrates leads immediately into a characterisation of the genuine puzzles, by restricting the scope in which such puzzles might arise. The non-trivial problems of one-and-many arise

> when the *one* is not taken from the things that come to be or perish, as we have just done in our example. . .But when someone tries to posit man as one, or ox as one, or the beautiful as one, or the good as one, zealous concern with the divisions of these unities and the like gives rise to controversy. (15a1-8)

So serious problems about unity and plurality – about one and many – come up when the unity in question is of a sort which neither comes to be nor passes away. From this we might suppose that we are back on the familiar territory of middle-period Forms. But while 'beauty' and 'goodness' are well-recognised inhabitants of that territory, 'man' and more certainly 'ox' were never so much as serious candidates for Forms.[23] Plato's Forms were never Aristotle's forms of 'natural kinds' – they were descriptive and evaluative predicates of a fairly distinct, perhaps even restricted, sort. Even the claim that 'ox' might be the kind

of unity which neither comes to be nor passes away is astonishing from Plato – although, of course, we might quite readily understand it, provided we drop our presumption that we already know from other dialogues what Plato is getting at. The more astonishing aspect of this simple enough introductory remark is that, by juxtaposing 'man' and 'ox' with 'beautiful' and 'good', Plato actually refuses to allow us to drop altogether the idea that we are talking about Forms – the same old Forms familiar from the earlier dialogues. For on the one hand, through talk of unchangingness, through mention of 'beauty' and 'good', Plato clearly connects this discussion which is about to follow with earlier concerns about the Forms; on the other hand, however, the placid introduction of 'man' and 'ox' alongside the beautiful and the good, as well as the total absence of other 'Form language' – say, '*auto kath 'auto*', itself by itself – should draw our attention to the fact that, whatever these entities are, they have been thus far radically underdescribed, and it would be rash to import all the metaphysical wheels and gadgets of other dialogues. What we know so far about the objects to be discussed is that they are unities which are not sensible and do not change; and they are unities which admit of plurality, thus giving rise to controversy. That is it.

I wish to emphasise the ambiguity of whether or not Socrates' problematic unities are Forms, and to insist that, even if they are, they cannot be so in any very recognisable sense. For one of the presumptions which leads interpretations of *peras* and *apeiron* into difficulties is the thought that we know we have familiar Forms here,[24] and from this it is a short step to assume that we must have particulars somewhere. 'Where there are Forms, there are participating particulars' – and many commentators seem keen to follow this maxim,[25] even though it makes a muddle both of Socrates' original point, and of the sense of the whole passage, and of the dialogue. There are, and will be, I shall try to show, no sensible particulars in the passage to come – they have already been deliberately, and with much ado, excluded from the discussion (14c-15a). However they are to be unravelled, the

fact that the trivial puzzles dealt with sensible particulars is evidently the reason they are boring. For they are immediately contrasted with interesting puzzles which (whatever else they may turn out to be) deal with unchanging entities, not with sensible particulars but with types – man, ox. Plato thus introduces the puzzles about sensible particulars *in order to* banish them – in so doing, he has made it as explicit as possible that such particulars are not a matter of concern for us here. If we reconcile ourselves to the fact that at any rate we are not dealing here with traditional Forms,[26] we might better resist the impulse to assume that we must be able in what follows to recognise all the complications of 'participation' which created so much havoc in *Parmenides*, part I.

II (D). What Are the Non-trivial Puzzles?

Disagreement over 15b1-8 is intense and complicated, involving proposed textual emendations and fundamental questions about how we are to read Plato.[27] Without emendation, the manuscript tradition unanimously offers a text that asks three questions about 'ones' which neither come to be nor pass away.

> [1] First, ought one to suppose that there are any such unities truly in existence? (15b1-2)
>
> [2] Next, how are these, each being always one and the same and admitting neither generation nor destruction, nevertheless most certainly this one? (15b2-4)
>
> [3] After this, in things coming-to-be and unlimited things, whether it is to be posited as having become dispersed and many, or – which would seem most impossible of all – as separated from itself as a whole, one and the same thing coming to be at once in one and in many. (15b4-8)

The reluctance of commentators simply to take this passage at face value stems from the fact that the second of the three questions apparently just makes no sense at all. For the

question would have to be: how can the *monads* be such that while each is a unit and remains unchanging, it is *nevertheless* most certainly this one?[28] The implication is that something's remaining eternally the same should somehow constitute a *threat* to its being itself – and this is the last thing we should expect Plato, of all people, to suppose. Eternal unchangingness has indeed long been one of the *requirements* for something *being* most completely, or being most certainly itself.[29] Because this question, so construed, seems so obviously to have got things back to front, emendations have been suggested,[30] in spite of the fact that on this bit of text the manuscript tradition is utterly in unison. Unfortunately, all the most ingenious suggested emendations have done very little to give us a question that makes obvious sense. Without alteration of the text, we are stuck with the peculiar 'nevertheless'.

Under pressure to make some philosophical sense of the passage, many scholars take the last two of the above questions as a single long-winded question.[31] There are, according to this strategy, two questions (borrowing Frede's translation[32]):

> [1] Should we suppose that such *monads* exist?
>
> [2] Then again, how they are supposed to be: whether each one of them is always one and the same, admitting neither of generation nor of destruction; and whether it remains most definitely one and the same, even though it is afterwards found again among the things that come to be and are unlimited, so that it finds itself as one and the same in one and many things at the same time. And must it be treated as dispersed and multiplied or as entirely separated from itself, which would be most impossible of all?[33]

I am unhappy with this alternative, and not just because it makes Plato compose a scarcely intelligible Greek.[34] Conveying the sense of the passage, so construed, more concisely, Frede says that 'we are left with two problems: first, whether Forms ought to be assumed at

all; and second, what kind of status they have, whether eternally selfsame when taken by themselves, or also dispersed and multiplied in the sensible world.' [35]

The trouble is, neither one of these supposed questions is a concern – even a passing concern – anywhere in the dialogue. Socrates does not ever call the existence of 'such *monads*' into question – he does not even so much as offer a consideration in favour of their existence.[36] Nor does he wonder whether they in fact remain the same. Nor does it ever occur to either of the main characters in the dialogue to wonder how the sensible particular things in the everyday world around us might be related to unchanging unities. The trouble started not with wondering how we could know that this particular red thing was *red*, but with how it could be that both blue and red – each necessarily always excluding the other – could nonetheless both equally be colours, and how therefore colour could be one thing at all.[37] The examples of colour, and of shape, were introduced at 12e-13a in order to persuade Protarchus to concede that pleasure might be complex, of many kinds, in a similar way. And it was this that introduced the 'amazing statement' in the first place. What becomes of pleasure as a whole when I have a particular pleasure is nowhere a concern of the dialogue. Instead, the pressing issue is whether or not pleasure is one coherent phenomenon at all, what makes all kinds of pleasures *pleasure*, and how the various kinds differ from, and relate to, one another. More importantly for the passage immediately at hand, the question is how we can come to settle these issues about *any* abstract unity admitting of plurality.

But eagerness to evade the impending nonsense of the three-question reading of the problems Socrates lays out leads one to foist upon Plato both an extremely inelegant Greek, and *two* questions (out of two offered) which have little or nothing to do with issues treated in the dialogue.

As this state of affairs seems hardly an improvement over the three-question reading, which in any case comes more easily from the text, it seems advisable to revert to the most

natural reading of the text, and make of the second question what we can. Regarding the first question, then, it might be just as easily read as a general hypothetical consideration, and not a question at all – 'if we should suppose that such *monads* exist, then. . .'[38] Because it is never doubted that the *monads* under discussion actually exist, it seems to me extraneous to introduce the question into the dialogue. It cannot, at any rate, have been meant in a very genuine way. I prefer, therefore, to take the consideration 'if we should suppose there are any such units' to be a general one, governing the two questions that follow as arising consequently from such a supposition. There will still be only two questions, then; but neither of them will be whether or not such *monads* should be supposed to exist – that much is taken for granted. This construal, as natural as the other, at least does not insist that Plato present as terribly pressing a question which he then ignores throughout the rest of the dialogue.[39]

Concerning the question which follows at 16b2-4 ([2] 'How are these, each being always one and the same and admitting neither generation nor destruction, nevertheless most certainly this one?'), there are ways one might read the question, 'nevertheless' and all, as a sensible one.[40] One suggestion is this: let's read this question against the background of the puzzles that have just been dismissed as childish. Sensible particulars are unproblematically both one and many. This may, at least in part, be because sensible particulars can just be pointed to, and the *fact* of their unity, uncompromised by their plurality, is just evident. Obviously, with non-sensible unities we will not have recourse to this method of verifying their unity. So perhaps the fact that they are unchanging makes the *monads* in question difficult to identify and distinguish – its an uncertain matter when you have a *monad* on your hands, and which one you have, in a way that it will not be uncertain when you have a Protarchus in front of you. If I cannot pick it up or point to it, it may be unclear and contested[41] whether it is one single thing at all.[42] This involves a problem of unity, and a

question of distinctness:[43] if one of the only things that we know about such non-sensible units is their shared characteristic of being 'one and the same', then distinguishing one from the other might not be so straightforward as we would like.[44] Unlike with sensible particulars, we will not be able to point to or indicate spatial location in order to make clear the distinctness of one unit from another. And whether some proposed aspect of it is in fact an aspect of *this* unity will likewise not be immediately obvious. Finally, unchangingness ('admitting neither generation nor destruction') will pose an especial difficulty for non-sensible units in contrast to the facile problem introduced by Protarchus – for questions of variety in a *monad* cannot be settled by inserting the proper qualifiers, by assuming that it is now *this*, now *that*. In the case of Protarchus becoming many Protarchuses, we can explain away the confusions by adding the appropriate qualifiers only *because* we are already quite certain that there is in fact only one Protarchus. In the case of an unchanging entity, whether or not we have a genuine instance of one before us will be disputable – precisely because it is an unchanging kind of thing, differentiations within it can neither be readily agreed upon by empirical observation, nor lightly explained away by appeal to changing contexts, places and circumstances. Especially insofar as its unity is concerned, the characteristics it might or might not have cannot even be ascertained, it seems, until we are sure that we have got a genuine unity before us.

So for example, that fact that this pleasure I am experiencing right now is a single instance of pleasure may not be very controversial.[45] It is much less clear, however, and the topic of some dispute, whether there is any unity at all to all of the phenomena captured by the term 'pleasure'. Socrates' own candidate for the good in life, in fact, is riddled with such threats to its unity. Showing up in some discussions in the dialogue in its aspect as 'knowledge', and in other discussions as 'mind' or 'intellect', it is hardly certain that the candidate Socrates opposes to Philebus' 'pleasure' for the good in life has anything more

than a family resemblance holding it together.[46] Thus it is not at all absurd to wonder about things unchangingly one and the same, whether any of them is most certainly 'this one'. This is at least a problem, which, as promised, would give rise to contention – it is, in particular, a problem that could easily arise in the discussion of hedonism and cause controversy not instantly resolvable.[47] It is a problem that is trivial in the case of sensible particulars; in its contentious form, it is a question addressed simply enough by the methodology offered in response.

The final question, then, would take up at b5: The question now is whether, among the things that come to be and are unlimited, a *monad* is to be posited as scattered and having become many, either being wholly separated from itself, or – which would seem most impossible of all – becoming one and the same at the same time in one and many.

This still lengthy final question does indeed sound like a question about the 'participation' of particulars in Forms. Indeed, it may be meant to recall such problems precisely to make the contrast.[48] Problems of fragmentation have arisen before, when it came to the details of how the existence of a Form in a sensible particular was supposed to explain that particular having a certain quality.[49] Certainly this issue is prominent in the *Parmenides*, at least, and even the language is similar.[50] But Socrates had seemed to banish talk of sensible particulars – of perishables and of how their unity is explained – with the trivial puzzles. It would be vexing on Plato's part, to say the least, if he now reintroduces them, indirectly, only twenty lines later. What is more, 'participation' is no more an issue in the *Philebus* than the question of the existence of *monads* – concern over participation is not what prompted Socrates to consider the principle of one and many in the first place; and although it is debated whether some of the immediately following methodological comments refer to particulars, nothing about answering the question of the good life and the good in life turns our thoughts towards problems of participation.[51]

There is, however, another way of taking the text, which need not be too laboured – a reading of the final question which does not require references to particulars and the problem of participation. This can be brought out by recalling two things. First, both the language and the question here echo the language and concerns of *Parmenides*, Part I.[52] It might be worth being more precise, then, about exactly what worried the young Socrates in the *Parmenides*.[53] As mentioned, the unity of particulars does not worry him – it does not worry him, he says, because there are non-sensible unities, and this should make the unity of particulars unproblematic. Parmenides challenges Socrates on the existence of these pure, simple Forms, existing strictly 'themselves by themselves'. His *strategy* for making the unity of Forms appear problematic to Socrates is to press the question of 'participation'. While it is true that Parmenides focuses in on the exact nature of participation, the motive and the consequence of thus focusing his attention is that the Forms, one way or another, end by becoming as fragmentary or disunified as the particulars whose unity they were supposed to explain.[54] Explaining 'participation' is *a* problem, perhaps; but what makes it so problematic is that any account of this relation appears to threaten either the unity, or else the efficacy, of Forms. And it is the disintegration, proliferation or complete alienation of Forms that would be the serious and intolerable problem.[55] Thus the mere variety among sensible particulars is used in the *Parmenides* to challenge the coherence of Forms themselves.

A similar strategy, then, may well be at work in the final question of the *Philebus*. It is in this concern about the coherence of abstract unities, and not in the pretence of explaining the 'participation' relation between sensibles and forms, that the *Philebus* echoes the *Parmenides*. Recall now the problem with pleasure – and then with shape and colour – which led Socrates to draw attention to the principle that the one is many and the many one. Socrates had at first insisted that, if pleasures were various, then Protarchus must offer an

account of some further quality in virtue of which all pleasures, varied though they might be, were nonetheless good (13b4-5). Strictly speaking, this is not true. If being pleasant is all there is to being good, then simply to assert that they are all pleasures is to claim that they are all good. No further explanation of their goodness is necessary. What, however, one would justifiably want would be some account of what pleasure itself is – whatever it is that is constant across all these various pleasures, in virtue of which they all count as pleasure. If that could be stated clearly, one could better assess the question of whether or not this could count as the good in human life. Pleasures, colours and shapes share a common problem: while possessing contrary qualities with respect to each other, they must nonetheless be able to share whatever it is that makes something a pleasure, a colour, a shape. 'Shape', for instance, which seems to embrace a rabble of competing qualities in the various shapes, must be a single thing across many kinds. It must be 'one and the same [i.e. shape] in one [shape, as a whole] and many things [the many shapes] at the same time' (15b6) – either that, or it is doomed to be both multiplied and separated from itself.

The issue, then, is *in a way* about things that come to be – it is, however, more precisely an issue about *kinds* of things that come to be, and about the fact that things come to be as some particular kind or another.[56] On the one hand, it is of the nature of an eternally unchanging *monad* that whenever it is instantiated, it is always only 'partially' so – in this way, or in that. Any colour must be some colour or another, and not all of them; and yet it is no less a colour for all that. But until we see the Divine Method in use upon its appropriate objects, it is difficult to see how these, the 'parts' of a non-sensible, unchanging *monad* could possibly constitute a threat to its unity, except by making reference to the multitude of ways in which such a *monad* might actually become manifest. Instantiated or not, red is wholly a colour (it is not anything but that) without being the whole of colour. If we think about sensible particulars, we cannot but see that while any instance may be entirely an

instantiation of its kind (red is entirely, nothing but, a colour), nevertheless it is not an instantiation of its *entire* kind (red is not *all* of colour), nor would such an instantiation be possible, precisely because of the necessary opposition between sub-kinds.[57]

This is a problem that has bearing on the wider themes of the dialogue, in particular on the way parts and wholes are understood. Although it brings in reference to the possibility of sensible particulars, it does not in any way make them, or their relations to abstract wholes, the object of concern. We are concerned with complex, unchanging unities, and although their complexity may be forced into evidence in sensible particulars, the concern is rather one of kinds (or parts) of a *monad* and their relation to the whole. We might want to be cautious, then, about assimilating *apeirois* to *gignomenois* in the final question of 15b.[58] And we should be similarly cautious about assimilating *apeirois* – after all, a perfectly ordinary Greek word which has a perfectly ordinary use – to *apeiron* as it will become specified in the course of the description of the Divine Method and its application.

The thought that *gignomenois kai apeirois* must be equated with the *apeiron* which appears shortly following as a metaphysical principle, underlies the common interpretative move which equates the unlimited with 'the many' and both of these with sensible particulars. It is also part (but only part) of what underlies Striker's insistence that we should not have expected Plato to be as precise as we are about distinguishing the class-member relation from the universal-particular relation.[59] Striker claims that Plato did not have, and should not be expected to have, the same distinctions that we have between concepts and classes. For him, she says – and quite rightly, perhaps – they were all of a piece.[60] This may or may not be a problem. If Plato's arguments only work because of an equivocation in meaning to which he was blind, due to force of language or underdevelopment of philosophical logic, then we would be rightly inclined to breathe a

sigh of relief that we are all much better logicians now, and read with benevolent amusement the sorts of flatly peculiar things we might be led to say were we not. If, on the other hand, there were some distinctive monolithic notion – one which failed to acknowledge a distinction commonplace enough to us, but *thereby* is able to convey points that it would otherwise be difficult to make – this would be reason enough to pay serious attention to the unity of Plato's argument here.

There is, however, also the possibility that Plato is not concerned with universals and particulars in the methodological passage, or that he was not after all talking about classes in the metaphysical passage. If the puzzles dismissed as trivial also dismiss the consideration of sensible particulars, it will be mistaken to take this last question as equating sensible particulars with the 'unlimited' introduced in the 'Divine Method' and again in the metaphysics of 23c *ff.*, and equally mistaken to suppose that 'participation' of sensibles in forms is of primary concern. Instead, the existence of particulars of differing kinds brings out in a vivid and unavoidable way the larger worry that abstract and unchanging complex wholes may be too indeterminately complicated to accommodate the unity that should hold them together and distinguish them from one another.

There is a final consideration in favour of resisting the reading which considers the indefinite things referred to here to be the same as the indefinite as such (still to be introduced), and the problem brought up in the last question to be one of participation by sensibles in Forms. As has been pointed out, nowhere is it the business of the *Philebus* to worry about participation, or how to explain the various contrasting qualities which sensible particulars might assume. It is, however, very much a concern of the dialogue to sort out how something can be one *kind* of thing generally, and yet have several and differing distinct and genuine sub-kinds, with opposing characteristics, as its constituents. Thus, at the conclusion of the discourse on method, Socrates insists we 'show how each of them

[pleasure and knowledge] is one and many, and how instead of becoming unlimited straightaway, each of them acquires some definite number before it becomes unlimited' (19a1-3). We must, that is, apply the Divine Method to both candidates for the good in human life. But this is not a requirement that we find out how a pleasure becomes the kind of pleasure it is before showing how it arises as this particular pleasant experience. Protarchus interprets this as 'asking whether there are *kinds* of pleasures or not, and how many there are, and of what sort they are' (19b2-3) – which interpretation Socrates endorses (19b5).[61] Because this is a central concern of the *Philebus*, it would be fitting for Plato clearly to acknowledge it as worrisome, and preferably here, where he is outlining the controversial side-effects of admitting the principle that the one is many, and the many, one. And this, unlike the problem of participation, is a problem that the Divine Method introduced effectively dissolves.

III. Solution of the Puzzles – the Divine Method

The method or inquiry that Socrates offers as a solution to the problem of unity and plurality in complex abstract entities enjoys a long fanfare, and a flashy prelude by way of introduction. In the first place, 'there is not, nor could there be, any way [of settling the questions raised above] than the one [Socrates] has always admired, although it has often escaped [him] and left [him] behind, alone and helpless' (16b5-7). It is, in addition, 'not very difficult to describe, but extremely difficult to use' (16c1-2). And finally,

> it is a gift from the gods to men hurled down from heaven by some Prometheus along with a most dazzling fire. And the people of old, superior to us and living in closer proximity to the gods, have bequeathed to us this tale. . . (16c5-8)

I pause here, lest the cause of all the controversy slip by unnoticed. The tale relates that

> whatever is said to be consists of one and many, having naturally together limit

[*peras*] and unlimitedness [*apeirian*]. Since this is the structure of things, we have to assume that there is in each case always one form for every one of them, and we must search for it, as we will indeed find it there. And once we have grasped it, we must look for two, as the case would have it, or if not, for three or some other number. And we must treat every one of those further unities in the same way, until it is not only established of the original unit that it is one, many and unlimited, but also how many kinds it contains. (16c9-d7)

This 'being the structure of things' is somehow supposed to justify my assumption in every case of inquiry that there is indeed a 'one' – a unity – and that this is perfectly compatible with its being also a 'many', or a plurality. But so far, this hardly looks like an explanation of the perplexity. If I want to know which things are at once one and many, and how they can be – supposing that it sounds at first paradoxical – then Plato's answer here seems to be 'because some things just are that way'. He has offered some minimal further step – a problem of the understanding of ones and manies is not to be regarded as a problem, he says, because of something about how these things, and the world itself, actually are. There is basis in reality for the necessary co-existence of unity and plurality. Everything has limit and unlimitedness in it together by nature. Although we do not yet know how – although we do not yet know even what two terms refer to – somehow their presence is supposed to make the existence of plurality within unity possible, and perhaps even necessary. Given simply the description of the Divine Method, we still do not know the basis for its reliability. And we will not know this until those two terms – the *peras* and *apeiron*, whose existence in everything by nature confirms the fittingness of the Divine Method for the job of acquiring knowledge – are taken up in their own right in the metaphysical passage. Here it is important to pay attention to the role they are given to play, and to our further ignorance about them.

IV. Peras and Apeiron

Because so little is said about them at first, it may be easy to overlook the fact that this pair, *peras* and *apeiron,* are posited from the beginning as ontological constituents. Whatever is said to be is of one and many, having *peras* and *apeiron* in it together by nature. This is a description of how things are, what is in them. If we lose sight of this, it will of course be impossible to understand the 'limit' and 'unlimited' of the four-fold ontology at 23c *ff.* as the same *peras* and *apeiron* appealed to here.[62] But because Socrates will specifically say in the later passage that they shall be using instruments from the previous discussion, and because he then deliberately directs Protarchus' attention to what 'we agreed earlier, that the god had revealed a division of what is into the unlimited and the limit' (23c8) insisting on a fundamental dissimilarity is a very bold stand to take, and one that a reader would take only in extreme necessity. Frede, for one, feels the force of such a necessity, and her conclusions on this matter are more the norm than the exception amongst commentators. As she puts it:

> Prima facie the connection [between the two passages speaking of *peras* and *apeiron*] seems quite superficial, because the concepts of the limit and the unlimited function very differently in the two passages. In the 'divine method', *peras* and *apeiron* were used as *criteria* for the division of the genera as a means to control the numerical completeness of the divisions on every level. In the 'fourfold division' [the metaphysics of 23c *ff.*] the limit and the unlimited are themselves *genera*.'[63]

It is not quite clear what is supposed to be meant by claiming that limit and the unlimited function as regulative criteria in the methodological discussion, and to the extent that I can make sense of it, it seems to me rather unlikely. The unlimited certainly does not of itself provide criteria for indicating when the plurality of a complex unity has been sufficiently

exhaustively described. Nor does it provide criteria for measuring unity – this would be even more absurd. Limit, on the other hand, also does not act as or generate criteria for determining whether and when the plurality or unity of a complex whole is relevant.[64] Whether or not this is likewise incoherent is impossible to assess, for the passage at hand actually tells us very little of what *peras* does at all. Insofar as the notion does seem to make sense, this is by importing the later usage from the metaphysical passage, and understanding it in the present context. This, of course, is very much not what Frede intends or thinks possible.

Plato is, I suggest, leaving some of what is going on in the methodological discussion to be understood retrospectively, in the light of the second discussion of *peras* and *apeiron*. The very fact that we cannot entirely appreciate the import of certain aspects of the Divine Method until we have read the metaphysical passage confirms the natural inclination to take as a piece these two discussions of limit and unlimitedness. For now, it is enough to bring the ontological character of *peras* and *apeiron* clearly into view. Then the task of keeping both the limited amount that we know about them in view, and the awareness that we do only know a limited amount, should not be difficult. And indeed, it probably would not be, if Plato did not go on to litter the rest of his description of the divine method with the word *apeiron* and its cognates. *Peras*, in all its forms, drops out of the discussion entirely.

Of 'the indefinite' or indefiniteness, we are further told – in addition to the fact that it is in everything by nature, thus accounting for the plurality of non-sensible complex wholes – that we must treat every item in a plurality found within a unity as itself a unity, in which a definite plurality is to be found,

[1] 'until it is not only established of the original unit that it is one, many and *unlimited*, but also how many kinds it is' (16d5). We are told that this is because

[2] 'we must not grant the form of the unlimited to the plurality before we know the exact number of every plurality that lies between the unlimited and the one' (16d6-e1).

[3] 'Only then is it permitted to release each kind of unity into the unlimited and let it go' (16e1-2).

[4] Leaping straight from 'one' to 'unlimited' skips out intermediaries, and that not skipping out these intermediaries constitutes the vital difference between genuine inquiry and mere sophistical competition. (16e4-17a5)

The listing of 'one, many and unlimited' [1] in a row seems to suggest to many readers that we are free to assume that, since limit and unlimited form a complementary contrasting pair, then the 'one, many' must be an elaboration of *peras*. But it would be fatal to the purposes of the passage to equate any of the pair 'one and many' with any of the pair 'limit and unlimited', for the latter were introduced as an *explanation* of the former. If *peras* and *apeiron* (or either one of them) just *are* 'the one and many', then we really do have no explanation at all, and not even the promise of one. If these two pairs just are the same thing, then there is nothing I could say about the latter that I could not have said about the former, and Plato might as well have spared himself the trouble of tricking out old distinctions with new terminology.

Even if this comment [1],[65] together with the thought [2] that we must know the exact number of every plurality that lies between the unlimited and one, does not justify any equation of 'one and many' and 'limit and unlimited' it may still seem to reintroduce sensible particulars into the discussion. For what else could be meant by the unlimited, or the indefinite, except the unlimitedly, or indefinitely many? And what could the indefinitely many be, except the indefinitely many number of actual instantiations of a given form at a given time? But these very questions suffer from the presumption that we already know more about the *monads* under consideration than we do – that, namely, they are Forms in a

sense with which we are already familiar from other Platonic dialogues. Reading the indefinite as a reference to particular instantiations does not in any case square well with comments such as 'granting the *form of* the unlimited' [2] to the plurality.

If we keep all this in view, an alternative meaning of 'indefinite' suggests itself. If there is some indeterminacy in any whole, this will explain how it is that infinitely many mistaken, or at least irrelevant, ways of making distinction may be possible. Moreover, the later examples of music, dance, and letters show that – in contrast to ox, or man – it is not altogether clear what is supposed to count as 'an instantiation'.[66] This is partially because the examples themselves are totally unconcerned with sensible particulars and actual instantiations – even when they explicitly mention the indefinite, as in the final example of Theuth's discovery of phonetics. It is also because, as promised in the interpretation of the questions, the 'ones' in question are not of a sort that could ever be 'instantiated', certainly not as a whole. Unchanging organised unities were problematic precisely because at least some of their 'parts' might be mutually exclusive, or because they had, as a whole, contrary properties.[67] The *monads* which form the objects of dispute, and so also of inquiry, are primarily systematic bodies of knowledge, or other complex unities which can be known systematically.[68]

Thus, to 'release the unity into the unlimited' [3] is not a covert reintroduction of particulars. It is a way of saying that when it comes to the infinite variety of possible but meaningless distinctions, it is no longer a concern of the Divine Method. It is, if anything, another way of *reiterating* that sensible particulars are not problematic, and are not to be addressed by the method here outlined. Systematic understanding has reached its limits.

If we are not assuming that Plato *must* offer some account of participation here, then we can easily enough read all the manifold variety that is found as taking place still at the level of *kinds*. We want to know which kinds compose any abstract unity, what are its parts;

and we want to know which kinds legitimately constitute that unity, and are not merely arbitrary subsections. Certain ratios between pitches form a scale; most (say 1:17) do not. We distinguish between rectangles and squares, we distinguish between orange and red – but then, after that has been done, are there really any more distinguishable varieties (say, rectangles whose lengths stand in a 2:3 ratio), that *matter*? That is, are there any further distinct varieties that go into constituting what it is to be, and to understand, this or that kind of object for what it is? If not, and when not, then any other variety in type – no matter how prevalent and classifiable it may be – will not count as part of the numerable plurality which one needs to know in order to grasp the original unity in its entirety, and as a whole. It is the demands of rationality – of comprehension and understanding – that set the limit on what distinctions are meaningful. Reason does this by grasping which distinctions or varieties or parts are constitutive of the unity of a complex whole, and by recognising what it is for anything to be well-related, well-integrated.

V. Examples and Applications

I will not dwell long on the examples Socrates offers of the Divine Method in action. Instead, I will make some general remarks in passing. The examples that Socrates clearly introduces involve phonetics in the first place, and music in the second. The reference to 'movements of the body' (17d4) being measured according to rhythm and metre is sometimes taken as either including dance within the scope covered by music, or else as adducing a further example.[69] Phonetics is used twice as an illustrative example. So there are either two or three examples of objects calling for the Divine Method (phonetics, music, and possibly dance) and three or four examples of applications of the Method, falling into two distinct kinds (phonetics, music, possibly dance; and phonetics again, but in a different style).

For his first demonstration of the method passed down from antiquity, Socrates appeals to a familiar case. He tells the puzzled Protarchus, 'What I mean is clear in the case of letters, and you should take your clue from them, since they were part of your own education' (17a8-b1). Knowing that speech is one and also unlimited in number does not yet make us knowledgeable about spoken sound, 'neither [do we] know its unlimitedness nor its unity' (17b6-7). In order to know these, we must know 'how many kinds of vocal sounds there are and what their nature is' (17b8). That its unlimitedness ever could be something we knew, and something that should be known if we are to count as knowledgeable, speaks against 'the unlimited' being a covert reference to particulars. We could never know the indefinitely many particulars, nor even know how many there were; and failing to know this could hardly obstruct our claim to know grammar or phonetics. 'Knowing the unlimited', then, will have to involve some quite different kinds of considerations, as will become clear in the music example.

The treatment of music is slightly more elaborate. Vague references to 'knowing that it is one and unlimited' are replaced by concrete specifications. In music, 'we should posit low and high pitch as two kinds, and equal pitch as a third kind. . .But you could not yet claim knowledge of music if you knew only this much' (17c3-7). The novice musician will first learn that music is a matter of pitch, of it being high, low, or equal.[70] But she will not be competent in music, Socrates insists, until she has

> learned how many intervals there are in high pitch and low pitch, what character they have, by what notes the intervals are defined, and the kinds of combinations they form – all of which our forebears have discovered and left to us, their successors, together with the names of these modes of harmony. (17c10-d3)

Knowing the unity and plurality of any unified, knowable object will consist in knowing which sorts of parts are relevant, and which relations and combinations between these are

permissible and appropriate. Knowing generally of something *that* it is 'one' does not yet amount to having a grasp of its unity – understanding it *as* one. This latter is only accomplished in seeing that the plurality is not merely an inchoate morass of unrelated possibilities and permutations, it is not a 'boundless multitude' (17e4). Rather, plurality consists in structured and definite possible and impossible sorts and relations between them. To come to know this of a plurality just *is* to come to know its unity – failing this, one is left 'in boundless ignorance' (17e5). Thus, 'every investigation should search for the one and many' (17d7) – grasping articulated, inter-related unity is an achievement and result of inquiry (even if, in order to get started inquiring 'we have to assume that there is in each case always one form' (16d4)).

After an interruption by the incorrigible hedonist, Philebus, asking how all these clear examples are supposed to pertain to the topic at hand, Socrates insists on giving a further example before revealing the connection this entire discussion of method is supposed to have with the confrontation between hedonism and rationalism. His final example is in fact a retelling of the example of phonetics – the first discovery of the system of phonetics required the super-human effort of going the 'other way round' (18a9), that is starting with the indefinite, and working out the kinds from there, until the unity of the *monad* emerged.

As in the *Phaedrus* (265d-266d), the *Sophist* (218c-236d), and the *Politicus* 262d-263a), the method put forward in the *Philebus* might seem to involve some collecting and some dividing.[71] In fact, in his actual description of the method, Socrates speaks of 'looking for the one' and then 'looking for two, three, or four' (16d4-6) – not of collecting anything into a one, or dividing a one into two parts or more. Although dispute arises over 'these divisions' (15a7), it is only in the final illustration of the method that division is mentioned again (18c3). If Plato's interest ever was in 'collecting' genera and 'dividing' them into their species, in neat division trees of the sort parodied in the *Sophist*, this cannot adequately

characterise the method outlined in the *Philebus*.[72] In the first place, upon careful examination, Theuth – credited with the discovery of phonetics – does as much collecting into kinds as he does dividing among and within kinds. And this must likewise be true of the grammarian, who first 'collects' all of the vowels, and then distinguishes them from one another. The structure of the conversation, with Philebus' irritable interjection, has alerted the reader to take this last example seriously. But his going the 'other way round' cannot be a matter of doing some 'collection' *instead* of some 'division'. If the two processes are involved in the Divine Method at all, it seems they must come as a pair. To divide a *monad* into its parts *just is* to collect each of those parts into a unity in its own right. The difference between Theuth's position and our own, with respect to phonetics, is that he does not have already available to him the unity-granting articulations in the assembled body of variations in type.[73]

Attachment to genus-species division trees as an interpretation of the 'collection and division' in which the *Philebus* is interested can also lead one to overlook one of the great virtues of the method of the gods – its versatility.[74] Even if we allow a sense in which 'consonants' and 'vowels' are species of spoken sound, still the distinction between the intervals which make up a scale, and the distinction between different keys is not at all lightly accommodated by supposing that we are dividing music into its *species*.[75] Moreover, even if the mention of metre and rhythm (at 17d6) are here supposed to be referring back to 'movements of the body' (17d4) – and so, to dance – still, rhythm and metre are certainly a part of music which it is necessary to know, if one is to count as 'musical'. And Plato acknowledges this much, at least, when he claims in the metaphysical passage, that music has in it 'faster and slower' as well as 'higher and lower' (26a2-4). But the difference, within music, between metre and key is certainly not a difference in species. It is not the species of music, or of speech, that is so important as their 'parts'. Differentiating species,

or kinds, will of course be part of the larger project of relating all of the various parts of a single systematic whole to each other; but it will only be part of the project.

Finally, it is important to note the sorts of 'units' that Socrates holds up as objects fit for inquiry by means of the Divine Method. They are 'speech', 'music', perhaps 'dance' – call them Forms, if you must. They are, after all, like the old forms, the objects of definition and inquiry. Beyond that, however, they are very unlike any Forms we might have expected from the *Republic* or the *Phaedo*. And Socrates indicates that 'anything that can be said to be' has limit and unlimitedness in it by nature, is therefore of one and many, and suitable for being investigated by means of this method. Anything we can coherently speak of has this complex nature which is exemplified as much by 'spoken sound' as by 'man'; by 'music' as much as by 'beauty'.

VI. The Relation of the Solution to the Problems

The original problem, then, as we can tell by the method designed to resolve it, was an epistemological one: how do we know what constitutes an unchanging complex unity? The Divine Method shows that we know this by coming to understand the parts and variations within a whole, by knowing their relation to one another within the context of the whole that they constitute together. The unity of complex abstract wholes is not compromised by their complexity. In fact, when we see how any complex whole is properly to be known, investigated or understood, we see that – so far from threatening unity – the plurality of complex, abstract wholes *constitutes* their unity. Certain distinctions actually contribute to understanding the parts distinguished from one another and how they relate to one another and so fit together. Some differentiations enable the whole to be understood as an integrated whole – others do not. And those that do not are, quite literally, meaningless distinctions. They are *possible*, because the indefiniteness that is in things lends itself to

arbitrary distinctions – what is indefinite does not of itself provide any articulation in structure that would indicate which measures, boundaries, or relations are possible and interesting, or otherwise, within a certain context. Because music deals with scales of higher and lower pitches, one *could* distinguish eight from seventeenth tones if one wanted. The high and low present in music, by themselves, do not do the work of including some ratios and excluding others – they simply make it possible for limit (boundaries, measure, proportion) to be imposed wherever it might turn out to be appropriate. Only because introducing $1/7^{th}$-tones would not make one any better able to explain or understand music, would such distinctions be revealed as superfluous.

Here it becomes most clear that epistemology is the other face of methodology. The point of the Divine Method is not to unearth myriad facts, but to enable us to understand non-sensible unities that are complex (that is, admit also of plurality). It is still a matter for the discerning judgement, perhaps, when the divisions of kind no longer contribute substantially to the understanding of the whole. But it is just this which makes the Method so difficult to use – so difficult, that it has often escaped even Socrates, leaving him behind, 'alone and helpless'.

In any study, the object of inquiry has its own proper kinds of indefinitenesses (high and low in music, more and less voiced, perhaps, in phonetics), which lose their indefiniteness to the extent that they become specified and related within a particular discipline. Coming to understand involves learning which relations of which sorts of things are appropriate and fitting. These aspects of potential indeterminacy, *apeira* (16d6, 17a2) will be the particular and various ways in which the *apeiron* is manifested in objects. Anticipating somewhat the later passage, the *apeira* may belong to the genus '*apeiron*'. In the four-fold ontology, the *apeiron* becomes apparent as itself a *monad* of the type here described – hence the reference to 'the *form* of the *apeiron*' (16d7). To this extent,

unlimitedness is a general notion, and has – like any complex whole – various distinct types proper to it – hotter and colder, faster and slower, higher and lower.

Thus, the two questions introduced at 15b1-8 are after all both pertinent to the themes of the dialogue, and addressed by the method. Whether or not pleasure was a complex unity,[76] what its 'parts' or kinds were, how they could be identified and related to one another, and recognised still as part of the same thing,[77] are significant matters in the argument against hedonism that forms the dramatic (and thematic) backbone of the *Philebus*. The way to address the first question comes out most clearly in the example of Theuth's discovery of letters – an example which Plato sets off from the others dramatically, as well as descriptively, so that we are inclined to pay it careful attention. There it is the very fact that no part could be understood without the whole which ensures that Theuth has uncovered the correct account of the phonetic system.

> And as he realised that none of us could gain any knowledge of a single one of [the letters], taken by itself [*auto kath 'auto*] without understanding them all, he considered that the link that somehow unifies them all. (18c7-9)

The coherent interdependence of a complex whole is itself proof of its unity. The answer to the second question – about how the whole relates to its parts – is simply the Divine Method itself. How can colour be both one thing, and yet necessarily always composed of contradictory kinds? There is no further answer to this question, or to the analogous question about music, than the understanding of the system of colours or of music as a whole.

VII. The Method and the Task at Hand

So far, of course, this does not tell us anything about pleasure. With the Divine Method in hand, and a loose and dissimilar-looking list of appropriate objects of

investigation – music and ox, phonetics and good – we still do not know how pleasure will fare when its unity comes under scrutiny. It may disintegrate entirely, shown not to be a single phenomenon at all.[78] It would thus be utterly incoherent to argue that pleasure 'as such' is to be taken as the good in human life – there *is* no 'pleasure as such'. Or investigation may bring out what kind of thing pleasure is, by showing what kinds – what varieties and variables – it admits of. Thus the analysis of pleasure later in the dialogue shows that pleasure can vary by location – being either physical or mental, or both – or by size, or by occasion, or by the kinds of truth it has or lacks. Pleasure can be mixed in several distinctive kinds of ways with pain, giving rise to the pleasures of debauchery as well as the full range of emotions.[79] Seeing how these kinds fit together, if at all, will be necessary to having a full picture of what pleasure is 'as such'; only with such a picture can we determine whether or not, or in what cases, pleasure either is or contributes to the good in human life.

This may seem an extreme injunction. But as we come more fully to understand what pleasure is through the detailed characterisation of the permutations it is subject to (31b-55c), we also come to appreciate how much work we leave undone when we assume we already know what pleasure is. In so doing, we come also to realise how mistaken we can be about pleasure and about hedonism (even in our criticism of it [42c-45a]), due to this failure to confront the complexities of pleasure.

This approach to pleasure is a particular instance of a larger methodological point that will assume increasing importance through the course of the dialogue. Wholes and unities are the proper objects of intelligibility, and are that by reference to which anything at all is understood. Moreover, understanding wholes means grasping them as a unity – and this cannot be done by picking out isolated bits, pre-packaged atoms, and sticking them on top of one another. What will count as a part, what will be involved in knowing it, is determined first by reference to the whole, within the context of the unity constituted by its

internal relations. First we make music our concern, and we thereby know (or come to know) that 'high, low, and middle' will be of interest and concern, and in what way it will be so. Within phonetics 'high, low and middle' might take quite a different cast, even though in both cases we are dealing with pitch.

Protarchus is understandably dismayed at the magnitude of the task at hand, and in his longest sustained speech of the dialogue, insists that Socrates do the work for both of them, if the work need be done at all, in order to settle the dispute between hedonism and rationalism (19c-20a). Socrates promptly abandons the gift of the gods, introduced with so much fanfare, and goes about painting vivid pictures of the mindless life of pleasure, and of the pleasureless life of the mind (20b-23b). This sudden turn of events, sandwiched between the methodology and ontology (23c *ff.*), will be pivotal to the argument against hedonism, although its significance, and the significance of its placement, is best seen in retrospect. Presented with these two options, the mindless life and the pleasureless life, Protarchus rejects both – neither of these could be a desirable human life (21e3-4). The life mixed of pleasure and of knowledge together is by far more choiceworthy (22a5-6). This Trial of Lives instantly eliminates the possibility that either pleasure or knowledge could be *the* good for a human life, and re-establishes the terms of the debate on new ground. Now it is to be decided which, of pleasure and knowledge, is responsible for or akin to the goodness found in any good life (22d-e). This, however, cannot be decided by simple imagery, and the disputants are returned to the difficult task of sorting out what pleasure and knowledge are, 'as such' and in all their variety.

This argument is an odd one in any case, and especially odd intervening as it does between the two discussions of *peras* and *apeiron*.[80] Among much else that is accomplished by this brief passage, however, the return to the discussion of pleasure and the good human life should actually prevent us from reading either treatment of 'limit' and 'unlimited' as an

isolated, self-sufficient bit of philosophy. Discussion of pleasure is what led us into the methodological remarks, and by returning to it here Plato insists that the reader consider the consequences of the Divine Method for the task at hand. In the light of how far we can, and cannot, go in settling the dispute between pleasure and knowledge we can begin to appreciate what sort of general issues might still need to be clarified in order to make any progress. Thus the metaphysics is introduced as the first step in a long and detailed attempted to establish whether pleasure or knowledge is most responsible for the good found in a well-mixed life.

VIII. Peras and Apeiron Revisited

Socrates opens the discussion anew by claiming that we will use some old and some new devices from those used in the previous discussion. He then reminds Protarchus of the distinction between *peras* and *apeiron* already familiar to them both. The *peras* and *apeiron* in this passage are, at any rate, presumably *intended* to be the same *peras* and *apeiron* found in the previous passage on method. In fact, even the *monads* that had limit and unlimitedness in them by nature reappear in the metaphysics, as they should, if the *peras* and *apeiron* to be elucidated here are indeed the ontological underpinning promised before as an explanation of complex unity (16d1-2).[81]

Besides claiming that 'different armament as it were, from that used in our previous discussion' will be required, 'though it may partly be the same' (23b7-9), Socrates follows this up by echoing the scope-setting 'anything that can ever be said to be' (16c9) from the methodology with his 'everything that actually exists now in the universe' (23c4). If we are not meant to be linking the two discussions, Plato is being excessively misleading.[82] But still more misleading would it be, after having Socrates warn us to be very careful about our starting point (23c1), to begin the discussion with a division of 'everything existing'

according to that which 'we agreed earlier. . .a division of what is into the unlimited and the limit' (23c9-10). It would be difficult for Plato to say more explicitly that the *peras* and *apeiron* supposed to be together by nature in 'everything said to be' are now to be taken up again, this time investigated directly, instead of being invoked as an explanation. Add to this the fact that they were introduced in the first place as ontological principles,[83] and that ignorance about just what these two things were was precisely what made explanation of one and many in terms of *peras* and *apeiron* dissatisfying – that is, we are due further explanation of just this latter pair – then it does become almost mystifying that the common line in the secondary literature is to insist on showing that the two terms of art *cannot* have been meant in the same sense in both passages.[84]

If we bear in mind that 'limit' and 'unlimited' did not previously involve discussion of sensible particulars, we may not feel forced to the unnatural conclusion that the two passages cannot possibly be speaking of *peras* and *apeiron* in the same sense. But a residual, if vague, resistance to taking *peras* and *apeiron* the same way in both discussions may remain, motivated by the sense that *peras* and *apeiron* play quite different roles in discussions of methodology and epistemology from those they play in discussions of metaphysics (or ontology). The rash conclusion is that the pair of terms, therefore, cannot be used in the same sense at all, not even to refer to the same things. Without drawing that conclusion, we might still wonder whether the roles played by *peras* and *apeiron* in different kinds of discussion might not differ – fundamental constituents of the universe may well function differently in discussions of what is knowable and how we are able to understand it than in discussions of what very basic different ways of being there are. Indeed we might even expect the way they fit into the discussion to differ, so long as what is being referred to does not.

So we will finally learn what *peras* and *apeiron* are meant to be. They are,

preliminarily, basic kinds of being, together running through the universe as a whole.[85] They are not, however, the only kinds of being. There is a third – namely, the conjunction of the two. This conjunction is not a mere coincidence of bits of limit alongside bits of unlimited (what would that look like?), and that is why the third kind of being is called 'certain *generations*' (25e4) arising from the combining of the first two kinds of being.[86] When limit and indefiniteness are appropriately combined, a way of being which is neither of the two comes about – but we knew that already from our previous discussion. Combined, limit and unlimited generate a complex, knowable whole, a mixture, a *monad*, (or if you must, a Form[87]). It is in part because of this heritage that unities can admit of plurality without disintegrating, and thus that there can be objects of understanding at all. And insisting that this is a third and different kind of being reinforces the earlier methodological points: complex wholes have individual identity in their own right, and not merely as a consequence of the conjunction of parts.

But conceiving of unity and intelligibility as correlated in this way means that not all combinations are created equal. Some – those that are unchanging – will actually succeed in presenting well integrated relations for the understanding. Others – any random abstract conjunction I might concoct, say, or any concrete instantiation of a well-formed abstract whole – will either remain incoherent and unintelligible, or else will borrow whatever intelligibility it offers from some unity (or unities) or another. Because 'mixture' is loaded in this way, simple association between various kinds of indefiniteness bounded or related in any arbitrary way will not suffice to count as something among the *meikta*. What, then, makes certain conjunctions intelligible and fit for understanding, while others are not? Well, intellect or intelligibility itself (28b-31b).[88] This is not specified here; but although we shall have to be careful about how we conceive of it, it will turn out to be mind, reason, and intelligence that is responsible for the well-integrated unity of any intelligible whole. In the

present passage on the four-fold division, it is merely emphasised that mixtures need accounting for by *some* explanation or cause – although things found in the 'third kind' are stable, they are not self-explanatory.[89] Their existence as *mixtures* is explained or caused by, hence dependent upon, something further (26e-27b).

The project of understanding the consistent meaning of 'limit' and 'unlimited' across the dialogue can at last take on more substantial claims, as we get more substantial descriptions of what each of these are. The unifying mark of the *apeiron* is 'the more and less'. 'Whatever seems to us to become 'more and less', or susceptible to 'strong and mild' or to 'too much' and all of that kind, we ought to subsume under the genus of the unlimited as its unity' (24e7-25a1). Simple enough to say – understanding what this is supposed to be getting at is another story. At first, all of Socrates' examples seem to be comparatives, 'hotter and colder' (24a8), and they always come in pairs. Even 'strongly', which is not an obvious comparative, prompts the immediate introduction of 'mildly' (24c1-2). It sounds as if something in the *apeiron* class should be any bi-polar continuum; then to 'take on definite quantity' (24d2), by taking on a limit or 'mixing with *peras*', would be to settle upon any particular point on this continuum. So that, instead of 'hotter and colder' in some particular case, we would now have exactly 32 degrees Centigrade, say, no more and no less.

This reading, put forward by Gosling as a way out of interpretative difficulties, is initially compelling.[90] Unfortunately, this does not sit easily with the definitions later given of 'limit' and of mixtures of the two. Limits, as we shall see, are supposed to be ratios, and not simply numbers on an infinitely dividable line. And this preliminary reading does not fit at all well with the inherent goodness which we slowly discover marks anything which has had the *apeiron* in it entirely 'tied down by' limit. Health (25e7-8), music (26a2-4), proper climate (26a6-8), 'beauty and strength, and again in our soul there is a host of other excellent qualities' (26b6-7) are the examples Socrates points to, in order to indicate how

peras combines with *apeiron* – or what results when limits are set on the unlimited. Later, the 'mixed life' will be classified among the third kind of being – the kind that was said (25e3-4) to be the result of 'certain generations' produced by the combination of *peras* and *apeiron*. But it is so placed because 'it is not a mixture of just two elements but of the sort where all that is unlimited is tied down by limit' (27d8-10). 'Limit' is what gives shape to a unified whole by putting an end to conflict within the amorphous 'indeterminate'. But for it to do that, it does not suffice that temperature, speed, or force are simply fixed arbitrarily at any old measure.

And already in the description of the unlimited itself, we might see why that is. There is nothing special about 32 degrees Centigrade, that it should be this rather than 32 degrees Fahrenheit, or 300 Kelvins. Socrates does not *say* here that there must be something special about the 'definite quantity [that] means a standstill and the end of all progression' (24d4). But the trouble is, any particular temperature, no matter how random, will have some definite degree or another. Anything hotter, no matter how much hotter it becomes, will always have a definite temperature.[91] It is just that the particular definite temperature that it is will change at any moment, and it could even fluctuate wildly, without being rid of the quality of being 'hotter'. It might be contended, of course, that any temperature whatsoever will always be hotter and colder than some other, so that there will be no putting an end to indeterminacy at all. Be that as it may, there will be some temperatures which are not just neither hotter nor colder with respect to themselves (this must be true of any temperature), but which are also neither hotter nor colder with respect to what they 'should be', within the context of things having temperature.[92]

What distinguishes something of the *apeiron* class, then, is that it maintains its indefinite quality no matter what – 'hotter and colder' imply that there is and can be no definite temperature to make them what they are. This does not mean that something said

'emphatically' has no measurable force at all – it just means that its being 'emphatic' requires that there necessarily not be *any particular measure* in virtue of which it counts as emphatic. Being 'hotter' demands that no definite temperature be implied. (It would be good, perhaps, to remember here that we are not discussing particular objects found in the world.) So, even 500°F is only hotter than something cooler; if it is the right temperature for firing clay, then, while it may be hot (*to the touch*), it is neither 'too hot' nor 'hotter' – considered in its context (the craft of pottery) it is just right. 500°F *is* hotter, of course, than the temperature at which one bakes a pie, and colder than the surface of the sun. Only if 500°F is the right temperature within a certain context, does it not in that context,[93] and so not *always*, contain more and less. But 'these things' in the *apeiron* '*never* have an end' (24b6). So to 'bring a standstill' to the 'constant flux' (24d3-4) of the *apeiron*, it will not suffice simply to impose some measure or number, or another. The only way to exclude the characteristics of the *apeiron* is within the framework of an intelligible whole, a well-integrated unity in which *apeiron* qualities must be reined in – when what would otherwise be without definition can be measured as 'appropriate', 'fitting', 'desirable' or otherwise. Such wholes, mixtures of *peras* and *apeiron*, are 'all the joint offspring of the other two kinds [limit and unlimited] as a unity, a coming-into-being (*genesin eis ousian*) created through the measures imposed by the limit' (26d7-9). This is why Socrates' examples of *apeira* becoming limited, losing their quality of indefiniteness, all reflect natural normativity – health, climate, beauty, strength. .

If this is the appropriate understanding of the *apeiron*, then it is clear at once why the two terms *peras* and *apeiron* show up together – it is hardly possible to articulate what the one is, without making any reference at all to the other.[94] This is even more extremely so in the case of *peras*, and Plato has Socrates waste very few words over trying nonetheless to explain it in isolation. Limit is simply

> what does not admit of these qualifications [i.e. more and less, too much, etc.] but rather their opposites, first of all 'the equal' and 'equality' and, after the equal things like 'double', and all that is related as number to number or measure to measure (25a7-b2)

Limit specifies how much of a given quality or characteristic a thing might or must have in order to be that thing, and perhaps how these quantities are related to one another.[95] What limit does not and cannot specify, however, is either the qualitative content of that which it serves to limit, or which qualities will conjoin with which in order to form an intelligible well-structured whole. The former, of course, is the business of the first category of being – the unlimited. The latter is the business of the last category, and the new and necessary addition to the discussion – mind.

IX. Conclusion

In summary, Plato presents in the metaphysical passage four basic kinds of being – limit, unlimited, mixture, and cause. The *mixed kind* might be thought of as a sort of recipe delineating what needs to be put together, and how – the fact that this is to be Angel Food Cake, for example, determines which measures of which stuffs are required. This will also, in terms of the methodology, be what there is to be known about Angel Food Cake. *Peras* would then be the measures, considered (as is virtually impossible to do) in themselves and in relation to one another, while the element of *apeiron* in the whole would be accounted for by the stuffs measured. Knowing how the two come together to create any particular whole will be a matter of ascertaining the unity and plurality which comprise any whole – be it a whole body of knowledge, or just generally a complex whole capable of being the object of study. The fourth category, cause (soon specified as 'mind'), is responsible for the fact that just these measures of just these stuffs prepared in accordance with all of the measures,

tools, and procedures integral to cooking will indeed yield the perfect, genuine Angel Food Cake. Less metaphorically, because mind is responsible for which stable conjunctions of which qualities come together, we can rely on the structure of reality being a rational, and so rationally comprehensible one. This is why to understand something as it really is will be a matter of grasping the plurality amid the unity proper to each case. It is through the mutual work of limit and unlimited that things become determinate and hence knowable. And this, then, is how the existence by nature of limit and unlimited in complex wholes grounds the comprehensibility – and indeed necessity – of the simultaneous unity and plurality of eternal *monads*, which in turn explains the multiplicity of the sensible world (so far as it is, indeed, explainable at all).

It might be objected that on this reading 'limit' and 'the unlimited' are themselves *monads*, and so complex unities, belonging to the third class of being. It would further follow, then, that both *peras* and *apeiron* have not only themselves in them by nature, but also the other (*apeiron* and *peras*) respectively. And this, the objection goes, is absurd.[96] But although it might be circular, I do not think that it is absurd. Rather, it attributes to Plato an intricately interwoven ontology, and reiterates the point that nothing can be known or understood which does not have any complexity to it at all.[97] All understanding, according to the Divine Method, comes from grasping the complexity of unified wholes, by seeing the parts of a unit and their relation to one another.[98] If something, say the class of the unlimited, admits of very little structure within its parts, there will be very little that can be understood about it, until it becomes manifest in particular conjuctions with limit. Likewise limit, whose parts lack substance to differentiate them, will be scarcely intelligible, except by observing the possible relations it might fall into with things from the unlimited class. It is because these two are best understood together that they, unlike unity and plurality, can be said to occur naturally together – in spite of the opposition indicated by the terms

themselves, limit and unlimited do not pull in opposite directions. While plurality might seem a threat to genuine unity, limit only first becomes intelligible as limit when it is seen in conjunction with the unlimited. Moreover, because limit just is the kind of thing that prevents variety from becoming too disparate for mind to grasp a systematic unity, we can begin to understand the multitude of unlimited forces at work in any single knowable whole and how they are yet able to be held together and related to one another. This not only dissolves the force of the 'amazing statement' – that the one is many and the many one. In making it a matter of course that things can be understood as complex unities, this metaphysical underpinning also suggests that intelligence would be incapable of grasping any unity that was *not* complex.[99]

This does not just, then, give us tools for knowing how to investigate Protarchus' claim that pleasure, although admitting of variety, is yet a single thing, capable of being the central aim of a good human life. A lot of work is also done towards revealing the nature of Socrates' own candidate for the good in life. In contrast to the exhaustive treatment given pleasure, the examination of knowledge is notoriously brief. This is in part because much of what needs to be understood about mind, intelligence and knowledge is already laid out in the methodological and metaphysical passages which lead into the analysis of pleasure. Knowledge, we learn by watching the Divine Method unfold, just is by its nature something systematic. While some individual person might know more or less about a given thing at a given moment, what there is to be known – and what knowing any particular thing consists in – is always already fixed, and it consists in systematic inter-relations. There are certain characteristics of intelligence, therefore, which remain constant and are not dependent upon the object of knowledge. Because the scope covered by *monad* is so large, we can see as well that these observations about intelligence and knowledge are not special features preserved for the understanding of a few privileged Forms of especial merit and distinction.

We deal with complex abstract wholes all the time. All of our conversation presumes their existence, their intelligibility, and their availability to shared – if sometimes disputed – understanding.

The fact that intelligence, attempts at (or at least approximations of) understanding, pervades all of our conscious life is illustrated graphically in the Trial of Lives. There we are given, however, no argument for it, nor does Plato attempt immediately to pursue the consequences of it. The foundations for what it means to be complex creatures, with the sort of mind that we have, are laid in the metaphysical picture that makes mind the source of intelligible complexity, and makes intelligible complexity the object of our own inquiries and understanding.

Thus, the subsequent analysis of pleasure carries force because it does not attempt to give details of what pleasure is for any creature whatsoever. The study is very much focused upon how pleasure can and cannot be experienced by beings like us, with minds such as we have got. But such an analysis is possible only in light of the previous arguments about the nature of understanding. The fact that there is anything there to be understood, what understanding it might involve, how and when multiplicity contributes to – rather than threatens – the unity of the object, and so of the project of understanding, and what conclusions we might draw from this – all of these are issues settled by the introduction of *peras* and *apeiron* and their role in all beings and all understanding. And it is from this that it becomes the work of intelligence to determine the pleasures that are and should be in a human life, rather than the work of pleasure to dictate what should or should not be thought about or pursued.

Recapitulation:

In this chapter, I have argued that sensible particulars, and the question of their participation

in transcendent Forms is not at issue in the *Philebus*, and that by acknowledging this, we can clear the way to seeing what is at issue. What we find is that the method and epistemology offered in the first discussion of limit and unlimitedness work together with the second, metaphysical discussion to form a highly abstract study in the nature of unity, plurality and intelligibility.

According to the comprehensive view put forward in the *Philebus*, understanding necessarily involves complexity, and consists in knowing the relations between parts within the context of the whole that they form. In virtue of this, 'wholes' serve a normative function – the very notion of unity provides the context in which it makes sense to think of parts and their relations at all, and the standards against which it is intelligible to consider something well- or poorly put together. Parts are parts (and understood as such) in virtue of the unities they constitute, and failures are whatever they are by reference to the whole to which they fail to measure up perfectly.

In the next chapter, we will see how these very abstract principles become concrete, as a theory of mind is fitted into the overall picture. Although Plato has so far *pointed* to the normativity of wholeness, he has yet to explain how it is possible, and what implications this has. He addresses the nature of soul and of mind in such a way that these are able to explain at once the intelligibility in the fabric of reality, and our ability to grasp and relate ourselves to that reality.

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[1] See, for example, Gosling [1975], Striker [1970], Hampton [1990] and Meinwald [1998].

[2] Cf. Chapter 1, section III.

[3]Again, see Meinwald [1998]. See also, Ryle [1966], Sayre [1983], and McCabe [1994].

[4] Of course, even if we decide that the two uses of the terms are indeed incompatible and that Socrates is depicted as oblivious to this incompatibility, this still need not yet mean that Plato did not notice the discrepancy. We would, however, have to find other evidence, preferably in the *Philebus*, that indicated

that Plato was himself in command of two distinct senses of these terms.

[5] Notably Gosling [1975] (esp. 211). Hackforth [1945] omits discussion of the issue. But his own interpretation of the method does not well capture his description of the examination of pleasure that takes place. It is unclear whether he sees this but does not think it worth mentioning, or whether he simply assumes the discussion of pleasure can somehow be made to fit the method introduced earlier in the dialogue. At any rate, he finds the illustrations of the method suit neither the method described nor the investigations conducted into pleasure and knowledge (25-26).

[6] D. Frede [1993], xxxviii.

[7] Cf. *Politicus*, e.g. 258b-267c

[8] Cf. *Sophist* 218c-236d (If we may go so far as to consider this the *same* method.)

[9] Meinwald [1998] argues in favour of her interpretation that it remains at the level of *types*, without sacrificing an understanding of the method recommended by Plato as a version of genus-species division trees. I am not convinced that this would be a large sacrifice. At any rate, her reading does not seem to address the arguments brought forward by Gosling to the effect that the examples we are given are simply not of genera and species.

[10] Especially in light of the use of knowledge at the end of the dialogue (55c-59d), we should not assume that knowledge is being used here in some especially strict sense that would require a restricted class of objects of a special kind.

[11] E.g., Hackforth [1945]; Letwin [1981]; Benitez [1989].

[12] E.g. Striker [1970]; Sayre [1983]; Hampton [1990].

[13] Anscombe [1966]; Shiner [1974]; Sayre [1983]; Benitez [1989].

[14] Cf. Crombie [1962]; Moravcsik [1979]; Striker [1970].

[15] Cf. Chapter 1, section VII. Because it is not these examples which finally win the concession, there is considerable controversy over whether Socrates ends up winning the point fairly, and then over whether Plato himself supposes hedonism to be defeated simply from the allowance that pleasures come in kinds. (Cf. e.g. Dancy [1984]; Davidson [1990]) It is important that Plato has not had Socrates cheat here, if his argument against the hedonist is to go through. If we take it that Plato (mistakenly) assumes the argument already won at this point, we can make little sense of the 'Trial of Lives' (20b-23b) which follows the methodology, nor of the extensive investigation into pleasure.

[16] Cf. *Parmenides* 129c

[17] Cf. McCabe [1994], esp. Ch. 2 and Ch. 3

[18] Thus, according to Benitez [1989] and Hampton [1990], the Theory of Forms is so palpably obvious that Plato does not need to mention that this is what is underlying the trivialisation of these puzzles. I do not find *any* adequate theory of Forms, much less the 'classical theory of Forms', in the least obvious in this passage. If we do adopt this final option, it will have to be for some reason other than its supposed self-evidence.

[19] See Vlastos [1954]; Owen [1986] ('The Place of the *Timaeus*' and 'Ryle's Plato'); Cherniss [1965]; Meinwald [1992]; Schofield [1996].

[20] See McCabe [1994], Chapter 3.

[21] Cf. Vlastos [1965]; Cross and Woozley [1971]; Bolton [1975]; Nehamas [1982]; Fine [1989].

[22] As Meinwald [1996] suggests.

[23] Cf. Nehamas [1982]; M. L. Gill [1996], 22 *ff.*, Fine [1986]. In the *Parmenides*, of course, the young Socrates is reluctant to admit a Form of Man, and certain that mud hasn't a Form. Parmenides chastises him for being too concerned with the opinions of others, but it is not apparent that Socrates denies there is a Form of Mud *because* mud is something ignoble; at any rate, this would seem to be an insufficient ground for doubting whether there is a Form of Man, Fire, or Water.

[24] Utterly simple, self-predicating, eternal Forms with some sort of causal powers; the only truly real things existing, and so the only possible objects of knowledge.

[25] Shiner [1974]; Letwin [1981]; Sayre [1983]

[26] If there ever were such things – not a controversy I intend to enter into.

[27] Dancy [1984] offers a concise survey of the alternative readings that have been explored. The debate between Shiner ([1974] and [1979]) and Fahrnkopf [1977] is indicative of a general debate between 'revisionists' and 'unitarians', both sides of which invoke method and metaphysics of the *Philebus* to support their view.

[28] Plato uses both *monad* (15b1) and *henad* (15a6). It seems there is not meant to be a distinction between the two. In what follows, I shall call the units '*monads*'.

[29] Cf. *Phaedo* 78, *Euthydemus* 281; *Symposium* 211; *Republic* 585. For discussion, see e.g. Vlastos [1965]; Nehamas [1975]; Irwin [1977].

[30] Most of the attention has been devoted to the *homos* ('nevertheless'), which seems to be the source of the difficulty. So Diès [1941] recommends changing *homos* for *holos*, following a recommendation from Badham, who later retracted that suggestion in favour of inserting *me* before the *einai*. Bury [1897] brackets the *homos*, and indicates a strong inclination for *ontos* instead, which inclination Benitez [1989] shares. Hackforth [1945] prefers to leave the *homos* alone, instead reading *a men* for *mian*. The more recent consensus is generally not in favour of emendation (e.g., Gosling [1975]; Dancy [1984]; Hampton [1990]; D. Frede [1993]).

[31] Hackforth [1945]; Striker [1970]; Gosling [1975]; D. Frede [1993]

[32] D. Frede [1993]

[33] This sounds, of course, like several questions. But Frede explicitly indicates that she has translated the passage thus 'on the assumption that there are two rather than three problems addressed' ([1993] 7). Gosling's translation, also adopting the two question reading, is more unwieldy, but more clearly posing one problem – namely 'how they can be such that while each is a unit and remains unchanged admitting neither of generation nor destruction, it is nevertheless unshakeably one but then as found in the indeterminate number of perishable things it is questionable whether it has to be posited as scattered abroad and become many or, as itself while whole separated from itself, which seems absolutely impossible, becoming the identical one at once in one and a plurality' (Gosling [1975], 5). If anything this translation accentuates the awkwardness of taking the whole of this portion of the text to be setting out one question.

[34] This comes out more clearly in Gosling's translation, which sticks more closely to the text. Hackforth [1945] calls it 'a clumsy but not impossible sentence' (20, n. 1).

[35] D. Frede [1993], xxii

[36] As he does, for example, at *Parmenides* 129, when Forms hold the promise of dissolving intolerable paradoxes about sensible particulars; Parmenides later gives his own reasons for insisting there must be Forms of some sort (*Parm.* 135b-c)

[37] Cf. *Meno* 74b-77b, where the similar examples are used to show the problem with the unity (or lack thereof) of a definition of virtue.

[38] Taking up the suggestion from McCabe [1994].

[39] Striker [1970], who takes there to be two questions at issue, one of which is the real existence of such

unities, argues that this first question is answered through addressing the second question. If the question of the existence of *monads* is answered simply through showing that the puzzles about unity and plurality that follow are not insoluble, then it may be that – in this weaker sense – the question about the existence of *monads* is meant in earnest. This, at least, would go some way towards responding to the clear enumeration implied in the *proton... eita... meta de touto* (15b1, b2, b4-5) that structure the passage.

[40] One suggestion from Taylor [1956], following Burnet, is to take the question with the emphasis on *einai*. Thus the second question is a repetition of the *Parmenides*' worry that 'being' qualifies things that are, and thus compromises the strict unity Forms were supposed to have. Whether this was the crux of the problem in the *Parmenides*, it does not relate well to the topics pursued in the *Philebus*.

[41] Recall 'zealous concern with these unities and the like gives rise to controversy' (15a6).

[42] This is just the point that some Wittgenstein-inspired philosophers would want to press – why should I suppose that virtue, for example, or even any of the particular virtues, will necessarily be some one thing just because there is one word? Plato was well aware of the fact that a single word did not guarantee a single unified kind (see Fine [1980]). In fact, later in the *Philebus*, Socrates will be shown to be no slave to language. 'It is questionable, then, whether an art that goes under one name and is commonly treated as one should not rather be treated as two' (57b10-11), and 'there are two kinds of arithmetic and two kinds of geometry, and a great many other sciences following their lead, which have the same twofold nature while sharing one name' (57d7-9). We might also recall the criticism of the word 'barbarian' at *Politicus* 262b-263b, which failed to capture any true distinction, even though there was a single word.

[43] These may turn out not to be different problems, or at least to be addressed by the same solution.

[44] Although D. Frede [1993] is among those who (because there is no sense in the question of *monads* being abstract and unchanging but 'nevertheless' one and the same) opts for a two-question reading of 15b, elsewhere she acknowledges that distinguishing individuals is as much as a problem for universals as it is for particulars (D. Frede [1989], 38). The *Philebus* shows that it is not just *as* problematic – it is more so.

[45] In fact, later in the dialogue, Socrates is keen for other reasons to insist that 'what takes pleasure, whether it judges rightly or not, cannot be deprived of really taking pleasure' (37b2-3) – what is not in dispute in any particular case is that one is experiencing pleasure.

[46] Although 'family resemblance' may not be a deflationary account, much less a denial, of the way the 'parts' of Socrates candidate are related. I shall have more to say about this in Chapter 7.

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[47] It is worth noting here that Plato begins to lead the way out of the difficulties at 15d4-8 'by making the point that it is through *discourse* that the same thing flits around, becoming one and many in all sorts of ways, in whatever it may be that is said at any time, both long ago and now. And this will never come to an end, nor has it just begun, but it seems to me that this is an 'immortal and ageless' condition that comes to us with discourse.' There are, of course, many ways of taking this passage; but at any rate, it does not seem too far-fetched to allow that the concern here is with conditions which give rise to *disputes* about unity, whether or not they constitute genuine threats to anything ever actually having unity. As an 'ageless' condition, we gather that this liability to contention is not an accidental feature of the way our language, or Attic Greek, happens to work, but consequence of discourse as such.

[48] See Chapter 1 and Chapter 7.

[49] Cf. *Phaedo* 100d.

[50] Compare *Parmenides* 131b1-2 and *Philebus* 15b6-8.

[51] Cf. Striker [1970] I (2), who points out that none the words used in the *Parmenides* to indicate the participation relation between Forms and particulars comes up here in the *Philebus*.

[52] Especially *Parmenides* 129-131. So much so, in fact, that Meinwald [1998] takes all the questions to be simply part of a standard list of problems about Forms, of which the first was addressed in the middle dialogues, and the last in the *Parmenides*, thus leaving to the *Philebus* only the middle question.

[53] My thanks here to Verity Harte, for pressing me to think further about the *Parmenides*, and for suggesting possible avenues of thought. I have also found Harte [1994] very helpful.

[54] *Parmenides* 131a-e

[55] *Parmenides* 129b-135b

[56] 'Coming-to-be', *genesis*, is taken by some (e.g., Hackforth [1975], Taylor [1956], Benitez [1989], Hampton [1990]) to be conclusive evidence that Plato is dealing with particulars and participation. We shall find, however, that *genesis* will in fact take on a meaning quite different from physical change in the metaphysical passage. There such unchanging things as 'health' and 'music' are called 'certain generations' (25e4). One might suppose that the significance of *gignesthai* has been up for grabs since *Theaetetus* 152. In fact, we shall see that throughout the *Philebus* Plato works to bring out quite a different aspect of *genesis*. What first appears as unchanging objects of inquiry later are described as 'certain generations' (25e *ff.*). The atemporal or logical force of *genesis* is brought out in the discussion of

pleasure. On being and becoming, see M. Frede [1998]. I will attend to this in more detail in Chapter 4.

[57] Cf. Gosling [1975], 144, where the problem is taken to be about the multiformity of forms, made pressing by the variety of kinds manifested in sensible particulars.

[58] The relationship might not be one of identity. One might imply or require the other. Again, it is possible that 'coming-to-be things' are not intended to refer to sensible particulars, or at least not exclusively. Rather than on the physical creation or growth of sensibles, the emphasis in fact is on the directionality implicit in *genesis*, brought out particularly well in the striking phrase *genesis eis ousian* at 26d8.

[59] Striker [1970]; cf. Benitez [1989] and Hampton [1990], who thinks the elision is innocuous.

[60] Striker [1970], 31-41

[61] As Meinwald [1998] points out.

[62] Thus Frede's interpretation of *peras* and *apeiron* in this passage seems to miss out entirely the ontological character of the pair. On her reading, it seems *peras* should be taken as related both to 'one' and to '(finitely) many', and thus form with *apeiron* a regulative boundary to any inquiry. Frede is thus one of those who claim the uses of *peras* and *apeiron* cannot be the same in both passages. (*cf.* D. Frede [1993] and in more detail D. Frede [1997], 131, 202-205. See also Gosling [1975]; Letwin [1981]).

[63] D. Frede [1993], xxxvii-xxxviii

[64] This is why, as we shall see, two further kinds of being will have to be introduced into our metaphysics in order to be able to do this.

[65] That we must establish of any unit that it is one, many and unlimited.

[66] I will discuss the examples in the following section.

[67] Black and white, for example, or male and female.

[68] Gosling [1975] would have it that it is only crafts and skills, *technai*, which are appropriate objects of the Divine Method. I think this misses the generality of the conceptual point that Plato is making here, and in the ontology that follows. It would also then be strikingly unhelpful in settling the dispute between pleasure and knowledge. We may or may not think there is some 'art of living' – a *techne* in the sense Gosling thinks suitable for the Divine Method; but pleasure and knowledge *themselves* are not crafts, and it was *their* unity and plurality that motivated the need for the methodological remarks.

[69] Hackforth[1945]; Meinwald [1998]

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[70] See D. Frede [1993] and [1997], 159-167 for a reasonable discussion of what Plato might have intended by 'high', 'low' and 'middle'.

[71] Of course, we may well wonder whether in speaking of 'the method' across these several dialogues we are already assuming too much.

[72] Cf. Trevaskis [1967]

[73] Thus Hackforth [1945] is correct to point out that Theuth must, just as anyone else, begin an inquiry by distinguishing the domain to be studied from everything falling outside of it. But until the kinds and their relations to one another have been laid bare, it is precisely the substance of that unity which is unknown.

[74] It is just this virtue that will be its 'defect' – the flexibility of the method contributes considerably to the difficulty in employing it adequately, lamented by Socrates at 16b. Cf. Hampton [1990]

[75] Cf. Gosling [1975]; Moravcsik [1973]; Meinwald [1998]

[76] The first question, under the hypothesis that such *monads* exist (15b2-4).

[77] The second and final question (15b4-8).

[78] So argue J. C. B. Gosling and C. C. W. Taylor [1984].

[79] Cf. Chapter 4, esp. section V.

[80] This dream interlude, the Trial of Lives, which divides these two passages, offers its own difficulties which I will address in Chapters 4 and 5. The peculiar placement of it, though, might be further explained through a parallel argument for the unity of the text, an argument which concentrates on the continuity of the Divine Method, rather than that of *peras* and *apeiron*. One could argue, that is, that Socrates' grand claims for the Method (that everything in every art which has come to light is due to the Divine Method) are actually reinforced by the fact that, having explicitly abandoned the Method, the 'dream sequence' leaves us with no more knowledge about what pleasure, intellect, and the good life are than we had to begin with. But these are the things which must be known, in part at least, in order to settle the real issue between Socrates and the hedonist; and in order to get at that, some attempt must be made by the merely mortal interlocutors to undertake Theuth's task of discovering a hitherto unnoticed order or structure in things.

[81] I would argue further, (contra e.g., Gosling [1975], 177) that the 'division of all things existing now in the universe' is an adequate application of the Divine Method previously described, although I will not be able to go into this here.

[82] D. Frede [1993], for example, grants that we are meant to be linking the two passages, but only insofar as the second passage is an abbreviated application of the method introduced in the first passage.

[83] Not regulative ideas, but constitutive – that is, actually *in* whatever is said to be, together by nature.

[84] Cf. note 62, above.

[85] Literally, through the universe *as a whole*, as will become explicit (28c *ff.*, treated in Chapter 3).

[86] This is the first relatively explicit indication that 'generation' does not have exclusively to do with physical instantiations. Although the expression is put into Protarchus' mouth, Socrates' unhesitating and unqualified response is: 'Your impression is correct' (25e5).

[87] If we go along with Frede's view (D. Frede [1996]) that there may be room for different *kinds* of 'forms' in Plato, then it will not necessarily do any harm to consider the *monads* as Forms.

[88] This will be elaborated in Chapter 3.

[89] On cause and explanation, see Vlastos [1969]; Sedley [1998]; Hankinson [1998].

[90] Gosling [1975], 165 *ff.*

[91] One way out of this mistaken objection is to recall that we are not talking about concrete particular things that get hotter and colder.

[92] This distinction is presented more explicitly at *Politicus* 283d-287a.

[93] And we see here the normative force of 'wholes', of well-mixed unities.

[94] They were, we recall from the Divine Method, 'naturally together' (16c10).

[95] Although it is clear that limit functions primarily as ratios, and not just any measures – it is 'equal, double, and whatever else puts an end to conflicts there are among opposites, making them commensurate and harmonious' (25d11-e2) – it is not altogether clear what it is supposed to be a ratio between. If we think of any *apeira* – that is, things in the *apeiron* – as coming in a pair, as it seems to be described ('hotter and colder', 'swifter and slower') Plato might conceive of any determinate amount as a particular relation between these two opposites. The prominence of geometry generally in Ancient Greece encourages this supposition.

[96] Meinwald [1998], for example, objects to this, although without elaborating on the nature of the supposed absurdity. Kolb [1983] seems to find it not so much absurd as inappropriate – 'The limit and unlimited are not themselves definite entities to be spoken about' (510). Contrast Hampton [1990], who argues that the unlimited *must* itself have *peras* and *apeiron* in it (43).

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[97] But then see Chapter 6; and notice the importance of systematic understanding, as opposed to the grasping of some truth.

[98] Thus, contra Gosling [1975], I take 'everything said to exist now in the universe' quite literally. Although the method is illustrated in the context of various fields of art, the point is reflected in any attempt to articulate something, or make something articulate. Thus the situation the method is designed to address is 'the immortal and ageless condition that comes to us with discourse' (16d9). This is an abstract metaphysical point: without complexity, limits, divisions, and differentiations, reasoning and discourse cannot get a foothold (reasoning as a kind of discourse will come up at 38c *ff.*, discussed in Chapter 4). This may still allow, *within* any field, 'simples' of a certain sort, which have only external complexity. What plays that role, however, will be a matter determined by the field of study or inquiry.

[99] We might compare this with the perplexity that Socrates and Theaetetus end up in when trying to base an epistemology on knowledge of simples. (*Tht.*201e *ff.*)

Chapter 3

Phileban Gods

Philebus and Protarchus have encountered Socrates at one of his more pious moments. Socrates opens his manoeuvres against the hedonist camp by asserting the traditional humility in naming the gods – 'So now I address Aphrodite by whatever title pleases her' (12c3-4). But this pious formula is made pointed by the sentence which introduces it. Remarking that Philebus claims Aphrodite's truest name is pleasure, Socrates adds, 'But I, Protarchus, always feel more than human dread over what names to use for the gods – it surpasses the greatest fear' (12c1-3). These are strong words in a dialogue so generally lacking in melodrama – and we are barely one page into it.

But this outspoken restraint voiced at the beginning of the dialogue does not prevent Socrates later from asserting what should by all accounts be a most irreverent claim. Earlier in the dialogue (20c-22b), the lives of mindless pleasure, of pleasureless thinking, and the life mixed of the two were delineated from one another. Recalling the pleasureless life of mind, Socrates says,

> It was one of the conditions agreed on in our comparison of lives that the person who chooses the life of reason and intelligence must not enjoy pleasures either large or small. . .He may then live in this fashion, and perhaps there would be nothing absurd if this life turns out to be the most godlike. (33b2-7)

Earlier argument had already shown that such a life devoid of pleasure was not fit for a human being; divine may be the only thing left for such a life to be, if it is even possible for it to be a life. But it is not, at any rate, the way one would usually characterise Aphrodite, whatever name one may use for her. And now Protarchus, who began the dialogue as a rather conventional well-heeled young man, rejoins, 'It is at any rate not likely that the gods experience either pleasure or the opposite.' And Socrates confirms,

'It is certainly not likely. For either of these states would be quite unseemly in their case' (33b7-11). Denying that the life of the gods is a supremely pleasant one is certainly non-standard, especially if the gods we have in mind are Aphrodite and family, and we are perhaps supposed to be startled both by the claim and by Protarchus' ready acceptance of it. Plato is not supposed to think the divine life devoid of pleasure, because we know from the *Republic* that even the finest activities are accompanied by their own proper pleasure;[1] Protarchus, as representative of the hedonist cause and of conventional morality, should presume that the divine life – perhaps even by definition – is the most pleasant. So this denial of pleasure to the gods is not what we might otherwise have expected. But in the intervening pages Plato has slowly and surreptitiously introduced a different notion of the divine, one very much in contrast to the traditional Olympian pantheon.

The unnerving ambiguity we are familiar with from Plato, in the way that he characterises Socrates' feelings towards the traditional gods of Athens,[2] and divinity generally, turns up throughout the *Philebus*.[3] Thus we have, cutting through the middle of the explicitly 'philosophical' work of the first third of the dialogue, a curious episode in which Socrates relates a simplistic way of resolving the squabble between the hedonist and the rationalist. He tells Protarchus,

> Some memory has come to my mind that one of the gods seems to have sent me to help us. . . It is a doctrine that once upon a time I had in a dream – or perhaps I was awake – that I remember now, concerning pleasure and knowledge. (20b3-4, 6-8)

About the story that follows, there are many questions to ask: how seriously does Socrates intend the argument embedded in a dream and how seriously does he expect it to be taken? How much philosophical work does Plato think the dream argument does?

Why does Plato have Socrates disavow authority for the content of the dream? How committed are we meant to be to the conclusions? And why does Plato interrupt the technical philosophical discussion with divine inspiration?[4]

Although he opens the debate with the hedonist by calling upon Aphrodite, and although he marks the beginning of the conclusion of the discussion by calling upon 'Dionysus or Hephaestus or any other deity who is in charge of presiding over such mixtures' (61c1-2), most of Socrates' references to the divine are even more indeterminate than those.[5] There is one very pointed remark to Philebus at the conclusion of the exposition of the first kind of being – *apeiron*.

> It is the goddess herself, fair Philebus, who recognises how excess and the overabundance of our wickedness allow for no limit in our pleasures and their fulfilment, and she therefore imposes law and order as a limit on them. (26b6-9)

Frede claims plausibly,[6] against Hackforth,[7] that the goddess in question must be Aphrodite – she, at any rate, was claimed as the patron saint of the hedonists at the beginning of the contest. But this remark is very obviously made for the benefit of the hedonist, addressed by name – who has lapsed into silence for the last seven pages. Although it has intimations for the treatment of pleasure to come, it hardly amounts to argument or evidence, nor would this be the place for such. Again, the comment is pregnant with ambiguity. Are we to suppose that Socrates really believes in a goddess who is responsible for making pleasure thus and so?[8] Are we supposed to assume that his conception of 'the goddess' is one shared with Philebus, when the hedonist invokes the goddess Aphrodite as 'Hedone'? For all we are told, anything would count as 'the goddess' if only it were responsible for what Socrates already takes to be good – namely, imposing order on disordered pleasure.[9] Euthyphro and the causes of 'the pious' may not be far from our minds.[10] Indeed, I should like firstly to show that in the *Philebus*,

what counts as good is prior to and responsible for what will count as 'divine'. Secondly, I shall argue, the notion of the divine at work here has less to do with personified deities, and more to do with the rationalist position Socrates is keen to defend. I shall take this pair of claims in reverse order.

I. Who or What is(are) Plato's god(s)?

We should get our first clue to this last point by taking seriously the starting point that Plato has Socrates choose. 'We must do our best, making our start with the goddess herself' (12b6). This turns out to be the first step in setting up a parallelism between the arguments on behalf of mind and of pleasure which will run through the course of the dialogue. Attention will alternate, taking each candidate for the good in human life in turns. This happens for the first time at the end of the 'opening skirmish', when Socrates wins Protarchus' support for the principle that pleasure is 'complex' or 'of many kinds' by subjecting his own candidate, 'knowing, understanding, and remembering, and what belongs with them, right judgement and true calculations' (11b6-c1), to the same argument, arguing that it, too, is complex (13d-14b). The implicit promissory note to take up in turn the deity 'mind, knowledge, judgement' in its own right is not, however, made good until we are some way into the dialogue – first at 24a *ff.*, when it is classified according to its kind, and then finally in detail at 55c-59d.[11]

Socrates' candidate, as the above list indicates, is indeed complex. It may be wondered whether there is any unity at all to the goods that he prefers to Philebus' pleasures as sources of value in a human life. Certainly, unlike pleasure, he seems never to treat his own candidate as a whole, in such a way as to show that it is a whole. And this is an odd thing for Plato simply to 'forget' – for one major theme of the *Philebus* is the difference between complex wholes, which have unity as well as multiplicity,[12] and

heaps of fragments[13] (which, as we saw in Chapter 2, could not properly even be said to be heaps of parts, because until there is a whole, they cannot have come to be any thing at all). It is, after all, its crucial lack of unity which shows the mindless life of passing pleasures to be no human life at all (21c-e).[14] When they have finished their long inquiry into pleasure, Socrates directs the attention of his interlocutor back to the rival contestant for the source of good in life. 'Now, let us not undertake to give pleasure every possible test, while going very lightly with reason and knowledge' (55c3-4). But Socrates, in addressing his own candidate explicitly there, very frustratingly looks rapidly only at different kinds of knowledge. Nowhere in what purports to be the equivalent treatment of the second candidate do we find an analysis of judgement, or of thinking, reasoning, or mind.

It might be that Plato takes all of these as more self-evidently of a piece than we, comfortable with our modern conceptions and distinctions, would be inclined to allow.[15] In this case, I think this an inadequate explanation. Rather, as we shall see as the dialogue unfolds, the inclusion of that indeterminate hybrid, dialectic, as a kind of 'knowledge' gives some indication of the unity 'thinking, knowing and judging' Plato thinks Socrates' candidate has. And it may be that he would not be mistaken to suppose there to be some such unity.[16] But however intimately inter-related they may be, Plato does at least indicate that 'mind' and 'knowledge' are distinct enough to be deserving of different treatment. He shows this simply in the fact that the two do come in, separately, for quite different analyses.

While explicit treatment of Socrates' candidate has been reserved for the latter part of the dialogue, there are ways in which the dialogue could not get even that far without having dealt with some aspects of the issue already. The discussion of pleasure began with a statement of what pleasure was, where it was found and what brought it

about. Only after this, and based upon this conception of pleasure, did the partners embark on a dissection of the various kinds of pleasure possible. When we turn to knowledge, by contrast, Socrates can begin with the analysis of *kinds* of knowledge, skipping over the statement of what kind of thing knowledge *is*, because we have already discussed the nature of knowledge in the methodology and epistemology of the first third of the dialogue.

After wringing from Protarchus the concession that pleasures are various, Socrates headed off on what appears to be a tangent. Suggesting that 'we give even stronger support to this principle' (14c1), Socrates introduced the notorious problem of 'the one and many', as well as his preferred solution to the genuine difficulties raised by the plurality and unity of complex, abstract wholes. But the solution which followed, as we saw, was no algorithm for unknotting sophistical riddles; it was instead nothing less than a comprehensive statement about the kind of thing knowledge is. While it was presented as a method on account of which 'everything in any field of art that has ever been discovered has come to light' (16c2-3), what we were given in the requirements for, and the application and results of, the method was a model of knowledge, of 'what makes us knowledgeable' (17b6). Did the method proposed not end in laying out the requirements for knowledge, it would not be able to serve as the necessary bridge between the genuine difficulties about complex abstract wholes, and the 'solution' to those difficulties. There is no algorithm for resolving disputes about complexity and unity generally; but once we see what kind of thing would count as knowledge, we can see how to go about resolving these disputes in each instance. Being a first stab at an elucidation of Socrates' candidate, it is no accident that the method is introduced as 'a gift of the gods to men' (16c5).

That this attribution of divine origins is not *just* hyperbole becomes plausible

when we look finally at the first description of 'mind'. Looking in earnest now for the source of goodness in human life, Socrates has divided 'everything existing now in the universe' into four kinds – limit, the unlimited, the mixture of the two, and the cause of the mixture of the two. Limit is 'whatever is related as number to number or measure to measure' (25b1-2). When this is joined up with the unlimited, which in itself has no measure and – like hot and cold – is partially defined by what it is not – then 'certain generations result' (25e4). These right combinations (25e8) of limit and unlimitedness include health (25e8), music (26a2-5), and climate or seasons (26a7-8). The fourth class, 'cause', gets a comparatively succinct description – about half a page (26e-27b) out of four is devoted to describing it. The main point is that nothing (at least nothing complex) is the cause of itself (or at least not the cause of its own complexity).[17] Thus we find Socrates claiming in the *Phaedo* that

> anything that is composite and a compound by nature [is] liable to be split up in its component parts, and only that which is non-composite, if anything, is not likely to be split up. (78c1-3)

There is less argument here than uncontested assertion, and we might be wary of importing into the *Philebus* principles from the *Phaedo*. But we can at least gather from this that there must, in Plato's view, be at least some account of the cause of any sustained, unchanging complex unity. Things put together are likely to come apart at the seams, unless there is some reason for them not to do so. In the *Philebus*, the point is more metaphysical than physical. Unity and wholeness cannot be ensured or explained simply by the conjunction of various pieces. Without some account of the *wholeness* of the whole – that is, of the nature and integrity of the whole itself – we are liable to end up with scattered and dispersed pieces, perhaps wholes in their own right, but no longer parts working together to comprise some unity. Complex unities as such are not

necessarily changing things, or even changeable; still, as they are mixtures of *peras* and *apeiron* – because, that is, they have internal complexity – they must 'come into being' through some cause. There must be some cause to account for their unity, some explanation of the wholeness of the whole.

There has been some discussion about why Socrates at 23d10, rejects as unnecessary the 'fifth kind' kindly offered him by Protarchus.[18] There has been even more discussion about whether the 'things' mixed out of *peras* and *apeiron* are meant to be physical particulars, or whether the description is supposed at least to apply to physical particulars.[19] The strength of the supposition that – against all appearances and however out of place in the overall discussion – Plato *must* after all be referring to sensible particulars rests on his description of these mixtures as 'certain generations' (25e4) and as 'a coming-into-being' (26d8) (*geneseis, genesin*).[20] And of course, we are very familiar with the fact that *genesis* applies to particulars, *ousia* to Forms.[21]

The question of just what 'certain generations' are, however, is not unrelated to the rejection of a fifth kind. Seeing these together provides a further reason why the 'sensible particulars' view of *geneseis* will not work.[22] For, if the kind of *genesis* – of which the fourth kind is meant to be the cause – is physical generation, then we will certainly need a fifth category to account for physical decay.[23] If, however, the kind of 'generation' at stake here is atemporal – if, that is, mixtures are called 'generations' for some other reason and they are, as seems likely by the examples (health, climate, *music*[24]), the same as the unchanging *monads* from earlier in the dialogue (15a1-6) – then it is clear that we will not need a fifth category to account for their coming apart. Such *monads* do not come apart. Although they also do not come-to-be in time, their coming to be a genuine unity is dependent upon some cause; their unity is not self-explanatory. More than that is not brought out in the first explanation of cause. But with these

divisions in hand, Socrates goes about the next task of locating each of the candidates for the good life within their appropriate category of being.

There are now, somewhat awkwardly, three candidates for the good life, not all of the same sort nor seeking the same prize. The 'good life for human beings' has already gone to the dark horse – the mixed life (22a); the original two contestants are now vying for the honour of being the *reason for* the goodness of a good life (22d-e). All three, however, will find their place within the four-fold ontological framework Socrates has introduced. Locating the first two, the mixed life and pleasure, is – even if not adequately argued for here – at least undramatic enough. The mixed life fits, unsurprisingly, into the mixed class (27d), while pleasure – with the help of Philebus – is identified as *apeiron* (27e-28a). But the whole business of classifying Socrates' candidate looks thoroughly odd from beginning to end. This is because it is finally time to make good on the promise implicit in the opening of the dialogue. We have addressed ourselves to the hedonist's sort of divinity; now it is time to turn to Socrates' god.

> As to assigning intelligence, knowledge, and reason to one of our aforesaid kinds, how can we avoid the danger of blasphemy, Protarchus and Philebus? (28a4-6)

Philebus responds contemptuously, 'Really now, you are extolling your own god, Socrates' (28a8), thereby serving Plato's purpose of ensuring that the readers do not miss the inference from blasphemy to divinity – if the danger of blasphemy threatens, this could only be because the matters under discussion are somehow divine. Protarchus is duly intimidated, and Philebus now drops out of the discussion with his unsympathetic, 'Didn't you choose to speak instead of me?' (28b5) directed at Protarchus. But Socrates seems to back down, claiming it was his little joke. 'Did my playful exaltation really confuse you, as Philebus claims, when I asked to what kind reason and knowledge belonged?' (28c2-3). What follows, however, is a lengthy cosmological argument,

strangely out of keeping with the otherwise practical and technical aims of the dialogue.[25]

II. The Cosmological Argument

In outline, the cosmological argument is simple enough to rehearse. There is fire in the cosmos and fire in each of us (29b8-10); the cosmic fire is responsible for the individual instantiations and not vice versa (29c507). As with fire, so with each of the material elements (29d1-3); and if with each of the material elements things are thus, then the same holds for elements in combination – the body of the cosmos is responsible for our bodies, and not the other way about (29e5-7). But this means that the cosmos 'will turn out to be a body in the same sense' as our own bodies (29e2); and (this is only implicit in the argument) that it is, therefore, not just a heap (otherwise, we would have to regard our own bodies as heaps, that is, as disorganised). But if there is body comparable to our own in kind, then it must be ensouled (30a6-8). Otherwise our soul, and the very fact that we are living *organisms*, would be no more than merely accidental and contingent – that is, there would be no explanation at all for the organisation which makes a body. And if ensouled, then the body of the cosmos, as our own, must be endowed with an intelligence responsible for the organisation and maintenance of the whole (30b1-7). And since this intelligence causes the identity and continuity of the whole cosmos, or of any living being at all, 'mind' belongs rightly in the category of 'cause' (30c4-7).

This is not, at first glance, the most satisfying of arguments. But if we take trouble to look more closely at how the argument works – and what Plato does *not* have Socrates advocate – we shall have some better understanding both of the notion of mind or intelligence at work in the *Philebus*, and of the significance of the divine throughout

the dialogue.[26]

The first thing to take note of is the general shape of the argument, across two different axes. There is the relation of microcosm to macrocosm, on the one hand, and the movement from fire to intellect, on the other.[27] Each of these relations involves some ontological priority, asserted apparently on the basis (or at least on the basis) of explanatory priority. Thus the fire of the cosmos at large is supposed to be responsible for the fire in each of us. This is not because the cosmic fire is larger than our own, although it is that, too. At the end of the discussion of pleasures we are told in the strongest terms that quantity does not bestow quality, worth or power.[28] Nor is it because the cosmic fire *lights* the fire existing in each of us – although the claim that the cosmic fire 'nourishes' our own[29] may be open to the bald material interpretation, according to which it is the sun which is responsible in some respect for our existence.

The reason cosmic fire is 'more beautiful' than our own is anticipated in the negative remarks about our own status, leading into the example of fire. Protarchus should realise

> that the amount of each of these elements [earth, air, water, fire] in us is small and insignificant, that it does not possess in the very least the purity or the power that is worthy of its nature. (29b4-6)

The comparative beauty of the cosmic fire comes from its purity – just as later, the spot of unadulterated white will be a more beautiful white, and more truly white, than a whole field of mottled or off-white (53b4-6).[30] But if it is fire's *purity* that is at issue, we can better see how it is supposed to be related to, and prior to, any particular instantiation of fire. For to be *purely* fire, as opposed to only approximately or impurely so, will be a matter of being fire through and through – that is, being what it is to be fire, and nothing else. And the claim, although still strong, could be put in more familiar terms. Each of

the particular instances of fire, and all of them together, are not what go into, add up to, or constitute fire itself, or what it is to be fire. If we want to know what fire at large, or as a whole, is, we will not arrive at that by going about adding up each particular instance of fire, one onto the other. This will most likely be for the reason familiar from other dialogues, that we will not be sure whether something is to count as an instance of fire until we know what fire is.[31] And this is not just an accident of our knowledge – for it is equally true that something cannot be, (or fail to be), or be similar in some respects to fire, unless there is already something that it is to be fire, (or to fail to be). The priority of the macrocosm over the microcosm generally is one way of asserting, against the 'bottom-up' theorist, that explanation and ordered reality itself cannot be built up out of an accumulation of pieces.

It is important to keep in mind, then, that the discussion here takes place against some imaginary 'formidable' opponent who would 'deny it [cosmic order] and argue that disorder rules' (29a1-3). This may not be the same position as the one held by someone thinking 'that the universe and the whole world order are ruled by unreason and irregularity, as chance would have it' (28d5-6). Protarchus endorses the self-congratulatory presumptions of the wise, who assume that intelligence orders the universe, against those who might argue that the cosmos all came about through chance. Socrates, for his part, allies himself with this view – intelligence is indeed the cause of order in the universe – but defines his position against a subtler opponent.[32] Because he is concerned not so much about the physical origins of the universe, but about how we are to go about understanding it, or anything in it, here and now, Socrates must insist that, whatever the story of the origins of the cosmos, it is not the case that disorder reigns here and now.

Socrates' aim, then – in contrast to that of Protarchus and his authorities – is not

to fathom the mysterious purposes of some omnipotent creator, in order to understand the unfolding of the universe as the expression of God's ultimate intentions.[33] This sort of teleological explanation presents an understanding of the universe which can only offer some notion of order – of what is to count as order – after the fact, as a consequence of however one has happened to find the various bits and pieces of cosmos lying about.[34] To such a view of teleology – no less than to a strict materialist – an account of order could add nothing, for 'order' could only ever be a name hung on whatever arrangement chance, or divine whim, happened to have turned up.

For a teleologist of Plato's stripe, however, a notion of order can actually do some work. It is the fact that order exists which makes it possible for us to find order around us – more particularly, it is the fact that fire exists, and is thus and so, which makes it possible for there to be particular things which will count as instances of fire. But this is just a reiteration of a claim we should recall from the discussion of the Divine Method.[35] Parts are posterior to wholes in the particular sense that, at the most fundamental level, parts only have whatever identity they do have in virtue of the fact that they are located in a certain way within a certain whole. As with fire, so with the other elements; and as with the elements separately, so with the elements in combination – the particulars are in need of an account, and they *can* be accounted for. They do not occur randomly, but for some reason. And the explanation of the smaller, of the instance or part, will be in terms of the larger, of the thing itself in its purity or as a whole.[36]

This leads directly, then, to the second dimension of explanation embedded in the cosmological argument. It is not for mere ease of comprehension that Plato proceeds from 'fire' to all elements generally, from there to body, from body to soul, and soul to intellect. It is not just the pure sort of something which accounts for the various impure sorts. However pure, different kinds of things do not explain wholes simply by

appearing together on stage at the same time. Such chance co-existence would be no *explanation* at all. If elements co-existing are to amount to a *body*, then it will be not in virtue of those elements themselves, but in virtue of the body, which dictates by its definition what is to count as a constituent of a body, and what will not. But the principle of organisation in a living body – that in virtue of which it is a living body – is the soul. And soul itself is able to do its work of maintaining order among elements of a living body in virtue of the intelligence in it. If, then, we have genuine living *bodies*, and are not ourselves just bundles of elements, then there must be some principle of organisation, establishing the order which is to count as a living body. And, by the macro-microcosm argument, if there is a type of bodily organisation proper to us, this is in virtue of the fact that there is – really in the universe, and indeed constitutive of the universe – something which counts simply as body as such. Then again, the same in turn for the soul – if *psyche* is what keeps body together, then *psyche* is what keeps body together generally, and not just our own. But many individual souls do not add up to a force capable of holding the universe together – they are instead only able to be what they are and do what they do in virtue of the fact that the universe itself has a soul; it has, that is, a principle of organisation ensuring that everything in it (including ourselves) is held together. Then similarly again, in turn, for intellect.

This last move, of course, may give us moment to pause. Plato seems here to be conflating soul and intelligence, *psyche* and *nous*. At 30c9, he claims straightforwardly that 'there could be no wisdom and reason without a soul' – but this is not the problem. We might dispute it, if we thought there could or should be something such as free-floating intellect; but there is no reason to suppose that Plato should have to subscribe to such a view, or that he would not have arguments against it. Much more troubling, however, would be the identity in the opposite direction – the claim that whatever had

soul, thereby also had intellect. For then we would find ourselves in the awkward position of either denying soul to animals, or else ascribing intelligence to them – and each of these claims seems at least out of keeping with, if not directly denied by, Plato's view of the cosmos and the living beings in it.[37] If Plato does claim here that 'where there is soul, there too is intellect', he does not do it nearly so candidly as he makes the converse claim. In an extremely convoluted and long-winded step in the argument, Socrates appeals to the four-fold division of everything existing; here, if anywhere, will be found his claim that soul necessarily implies intellect.

> We surely cannot maintain this assumption, with respect to our four classes (limit, the unlimited, their mixture, and their cause – which is present in everything): that this cause is recognised as all-encompassing wisdom, since among us it imports soul and provides training for the body and medicine for its ailments and in other cases order and restitution, but that it should fail to be responsible for the same things on a large scale in the whole universe (things that are, in addition, beautiful and pure), for the contrivance of what has so fair and wonderful a nature.
>
> *Protarchus*: That would make no sense at all. (30a10-c1)

The argument seems to start by taking ourselves as a mixture; otherwise it is difficult to see why we should be talking about the four *genera* just now, and why we should be looking for a *cause* of our own well-being. We should be a mixture of limit and unlimitedness, if we are talking about the relevant kind of mixture and supposing some account of the cause of the mixture to be outstanding. Apparently the 'unlimited' in this case would be the particular elements that compose the body. Does 'soul', then, count as the 'limit' of these elements when they come together? The notion of a soul as the proper relations between parts is not entirely foreign to Plato's thought.[38] At any

rate, being a mixture of the relevant sort, there must be some cause of this mixture, or this kind of mixture, coming into being and remaining in a well-ordered state. Although the limits are the right ones to set for this kind of mixture, they themselves are responsible neither for their own appropriateness, nor for the resultant stability. The former aspect will be accounted for only much later in the dialogue;[39] the latter aspect, however, stability, looks to some cause.[40] In the case of living beings, while the soul may *be* the order imposed on body, it is the aspect of the intellect in the soul which is responsible for the maintenance of that order,[41] even if perhaps it is so responsible *through the soul*. (This last seems to be the force of the point that we cannot have intellect without soul.) This is especially clear in the case of human soul; the maintenance of order in a human soul consists in making of one's life a unified whole. Conceiving of – and then arranging – a life as a well-ordered whole requires an active intellect (even if it also requires much else besides). Through ordering the soul, one is able to create a 'life' – a genuine unity – which in turn supports the healthy unity of the soul.

But then this does sound like an argument to the effect that wherever there is ensouled body, there must also be intellect. In addition, the macro-microcosm argument would seem to need this premise, if we are to arrive at the conclusion (as we do) that mind is the cause of everything. For we have shown so far only that the body of the cosmos must have a soul – all of the elements, that is, form an ordered whole. But unless souls, by their nature, imply intellect, then the mere conjunction of the two in the case of human beings may be ascribed to chance, and said to defy any further explanation. If, on the other hand, there is to be some explanation for the fact that our souls fit our bodies, it will be the fact that intellect governs them both. And if there is to be some explanation for the fact that intellect is the thing capable of making of body and soul a consistent

whole, it will be found in the nature of intellect itself. Thus it is that intellect as a whole is responsible for the order of the universe as a whole. And it is *thereby* responsible for the intellect and order in us.[42] Being intelligible – having intellect actually at work – is what makes something a unity, a thing, a 'this', or a whole. Whatever is utterly devoid of intelligence could not come forth as a 'thing' at all.

It is at this point that one might feel the parallel lines of the macrocosm and microcosm converge. For, one of the reasons that our nature (who and how we are) will be accounted for by the nature of the universe as a whole is that we are, in fact, parts of the universe. We are not outside of the natural order, but part of its being well-ordered and functioning well. For *its* intellect to ensure continuing harmony of its elements just is for the intellect of the world-soul to ensure that we are appropriately equipped to maintain our own good order. Although this means that mind will be prior in order of significance and goodness to any other kind of constitutive part – limit, unlimited, mixture – this does not make the cause of the universe, mind, external to the universe itself any more than our own intellects are 'external' to us. Ontologically distinct, intellect nonetheless permeates the cosmos and does not stand outside of it. Intellect just is that on account of which everything else is able to be as it is. From this, it is a short step to Socrates' triumphant conclusion:

> You will therefore say that in the nature of Zeus there is a soul of a king, as well as a king's reason, in virtue of this power displayed by the cause, while paying tribute for other fine qualities in the other divinities, in conformity with the names by which they like to be addressed. . .
> [This]comes as a support for the thinkers of old who held the view that reason is forever the ruler over the universe. (30d1-e1)

In the end, then, Socrates makes a nod to orthodoxy. He allows Protarchus to keep his allegiance to Zeus. But what is important about Zeus, what *makes* him 'king' of the universe, has been reconceived and articulated according to Socrates' values. It is 'in virtue of his power displayed by the cause', from which we can infer a 'kingly' mind and soul, that Zeus reigns supreme. Socrates therefore puts a question mark almost immediately after his concession, by summing up the productive discussion, which succeeded in locating 'mind' in the category of 'cause', with: 'Sometimes joking is a relief from seriousness' (30d6). For as he has just made clear, what he understands by Zeus is not the thunderbolt-hurling philanderer of Greek mythology.[43] In fact, Socrates' 'Zeus' barely has any character at all. It is merely a formal characteristic of the cosmos, which can be inferred from the order of things, from Plato's metaphysics in the *Philebus*, and required by any teleological account. Something must be responsible for things being as they are. For if there is nothing doing this work, then the world is disordered and knowledge – and even inquiry – is futile; and if the 'something' holding the universe together is 'chance', then there is no guarantee that the order we happen to find will also be an intelligible one, well-put-together – an order capable of making it clear to us why things are as they are. So whatever is going to be responsible for real *order*, must be either an intelligent being, or simply intelligence itself. Plato, in the *Philebus*, chooses the latter, thereby preserving the unity and integrity of the cosmos as a whole.[44] With such an account of divinity, it is no wonder that talk of pleasure would be out of place (33b3-11), no matter what your account of pleasure.[45]

We can also appreciate now the full force of Socrates' observation that it would hardly be surprising if the mindful life devoid of pleasure turned out to be the most divine – in fact, divine mind (ensouled, and so alive) just *is* such a life. And although both formal and not standing outside the cosmos as a whole, still the divine as conceived

by Socrates is, in comparison with, say evolutionary theory and the Modern Scientific World View, certainly a notion of divinity.[46] The whole of the cosmos is rationally put together and maintained, and although our reason is akin to – and thus capable of grasping – this rational order, this is less a feature of human understanding and more a feature of the cosmos. 'Order' is not whatever is comprehensible to human minds; rather, human minds are capable of grasping order at all because they are a living part of mind as such, which permeates the whole of the universe, including our own souls.

Thus the requirements on intelligibility, and the principle of normativity of wholes – that identity and ideal standards are established by the unity of the whole, and only thereby conferred on the parts – joins with the simple observation that *things really are intelligible to us.* Reality is the sort of thing that is intelligible, and it is intelligible to us. We, in turn, are within this framework of intelligibility, and in virtue of it, capable of grasping the order around us, and within us.[47]

III. What Comes first – the Good or God?

But for all that divine mind might grant us a rationally ordered universe, it does little, of itself, towards explaining why a *rationally* ordered cosmos should also be a *well*-ordered cosmos. Isn't this just the familiar rationalist prejudice?

Plato, in fact, does try to give some arguments about why rational order will also be good order. They may not be satisfactory, but they will help us to see why with all his piety, Socrates does not consider mind itself the ultimate source (or ground) of all goodness.[48] Even rationalism is only good in virtue of the relation of reason to goodness itself.

Knowing, Plato has argued earlier, is constituted by knowing the measures of and relations between parts comprising any whole. This is so, of course, because reality is

suitably constructed. But the counterpart to this claim – not made outright, but still required by the introduction of *peras* and *apeiron* – is the observation that arbitrary and changing amounts are the antithesis of measure. But what is arbitrary, unreliable and changeable cannot be responsible for, cause or explain the continuous, connected, and inter-related stability that we do confront. In fact, it could not *explain* anything at all. If common sense allows that there is much that is chaotic surrounding us, which seems to defy understanding, this is only against a background of finding reality more or less reliably constant, day after day. Messy particulars only look messy, and show up as particulars, in a world that is largely comprehensible. Moreover, if we do allow that both order and disorder surround us (and I do not say that Plato *does*[49]), then it is easy enough to see that what is chaotic could in no way account for regularity; whereas an account of regularity may allow room for disorder, or at least leave it no less comprehensible than otherwise. In these ways, then, we might begin to see how measure and stability take precedence over arbitrariness and changeability.

It is, at any rate measure, proportion, and what has measure or is proportioned that become the ultimate source of goodness in any good life.[50] Even on the rationalist account, mind and reason only come in third after these (66a-c).[51] Mind, that is, only counts as good and worthwhile in virtue of the fact that it is just *mind* that is the sort of thing well-suited to grasping and therefore also creating measure and order. Divine as it may be, and responsible as it may be on the cosmic level for the introduction and continued existence of anything well-proportioned, fitting and in measured relation – still, while this allows it to count as divine, this is not itself enough to guarantee goodness. Only if we add to this the fact that there is something that it means to be better and worse, that there is something true and good for the divine mind to understand, does the intellect of the world-soul (and thus the world-soul itself) become itself – as is

only fitting – something good. But this means that although god is immanent in the universe and everything that is, it is still dependent for its value on measure and proportion themselves being good. Pious though he is, in his own way and for good reason, Socrates does not rely on an invocation of the gods in his explanations. Instead, god – and what can count as divine – will be determined by whatever holds a certain place within an entire view of the cosmos, the good, and the well-ordered universe.

If we look back over the dialogue with the notion of the divine in mind, some interesting things emerge. The last invocation of divinity, before Socrates began to classify mind, occurred just as he introduced the third ontological kind, mixture (25b7-10). In that immediate context, the reference to divine help seems odd. But if mind is responsible for mixtures, and mind just is the rationalist's conception of the divine, then turning to 'one of the gods' for assistance in illuminating the third kind amounts to relying on intellect to be responsible for the description of mixture, whose cause is intellect. It is thus entirely fitting that divine sources should assist with making 'mixture' intelligible. Again, we should recall the very peculiar way in which Socrates suddenly recollects a dream about pleasure, knowledge and goodness. Whether he was dreaming when he heard it or awake (20b6-7), the recollection of the account was brought by some god ('Some memory has come to my mind that one of the gods seems to have sent to me to help us' [20b3-4]). And it is this god's intervention which introduces the mixed life, which quickly wins the competition, into the conversation in the first place. Once again, it is the divine – on Socrates' view reason itself – that is responsible for introducing mixture. This point is picked up later (61b11-c2), when the character of the mixed life is finally articulated, based on the conclusions about pleasure and knowledge. Before turning his hands to the mixing, Socrates – again, apparently apropos of nothing – invokes divine assistance. Reason, characterised as divine, is relied upon to be

responsible for the mixture's being a good one – that is, being a genuine mixture.

Finally, almost as peculiarly set-up as the sudden dream-recollection that introduces the Trial of Lives, there is the Divine Method itself. This method handed down by the gods is responsible specifically for any knowledge of abstract, complex unities, 'for everything in any field of art that has ever been discovered' (16b2-3). And it is specifically responsible for a whole methodological-epistemological framework in which it not only becomes intelligible how we can know complex wholes, but also – by interweaving with an account of metaphysics and mind – makes it doubtful whether we could ever know anything else, or in any other way.

IV. Plato's Theism

There is always the option of the flat-footed reading of Socrates' piety. Plato presents Socrates as a Good Man. All Good Men are Pious. Therefore, Socrates is Pious. And piety consists in nothing other than being respectful of the city's gods, and adhering generally to conventional forms of religion. Thus, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates will not even go so far as to depersonify the North Wind.[52] But his explicit refusal to do so gives lie to the reading of Plato which would suppose that it never *occurred* to him to challenge conventional morality. The question is, on what level is it appropriate and significant to challenge conceptions of divinity? Accepting the Olympic pantheon strictly as it was given would sit ill with the project Plato sets out in the dialogues, in which anything must eventually be held up to rational scrutiny, and made to give an account of itself.[53] Accepting a modified pantheon of mysterious spirits 'personal like ourselves, but, unlike ourselves, having the power to invade at will the causal order to which our own actions are confined, effecting in it changes of incalculable extent to cause us great benefit, or, where they to choose otherwise, total devastation and ruin'[54]

would fit no better the holistic view of the cosmos, as an integrated, well-related unity.

But even allowing that Plato did not accept, and *could not* have accepted, the vivid characters of the Homeric gods at face value, still the assumption might be made that Plato accepted another, equally straightforward, account of the divine. For Plato, we might suppose from the *Timaeus*, believed in an (almost) omnipotent Creator-god, transcendent and existing apart from the universe.[55] And it is, presumably, on this hook that his idealist ethics hang, as well as his peculiar metaphysics. Placing god, the source of goodness, outside of the natural order, living well becomes a matter of the intellectual intuition of a separate and perfect realm.[56] A literal reading of the *Phaedrus*, for example, might reinforce this view of Plato's approach to ethics and divinity, as would certain readings of the myth of the world-cycles in the *Politicus*.[57]

But, in the *Politicus*, the world-cycle that we are in is explicitly the one in which the 'divine hand' is no longer guiding the course of events.[58] For us, right now, whatever order or intelligence or reason there is in the universe is *within* the fabric of the universe,[59] there to be found, and not some force standing outside and above it.[60] Similarly, the *Philebus* is singularly uninterested in the *origins* of the order in the cosmos. However it was generated, the intelligible order graspable by intellect is there now, latent within the universe, responsible by its presence for whatever sense, rhyme and reason, we can make of things.

Because his concern is with – and his commitment is to – reason, intelligibility and judgement as such, Plato can play freely with whatever stories are told about the temporal generation of these things and their products. Although much of Socratic ethics would reject it, there is no *necessity* that the gods of Mt. Olympus, or the Divine Craftsman of the *Timaeus*, or the process of natural selection *not* be genuine accounts of cosmogony. We have, however, the evidence of the very existence of reason itself as our

guide to evaluate the plausibility of these claims, and to set limits on what can be claimed.

V. Conclusion

Applying the principles of unity and plurality, set out in the methodology and metaphysics, to everything existing, we thus get a picture of what it means for human beings to be part of the universe as a whole, and for reason, in a different way, to be part of that same whole. Neither reason, nor human beings, are extra appendages or afterthoughts in the intelligible order – overlaid on top of, or else placed within, some independent, pre-fabricated universe.[61] Because it is reason running through the universe which grants it unity, we are justified both in our attempts to understand – and to take that understanding to be *of reality*, a grasping and not a creating – and in conceiving of ourselves as ordered after that same pattern that we find in the universe. This will not mean that we ought to model our lives on that of the Divine mind so far as is possible – on the contrary, it gives us good grounds for supposing this would inappropriate. What it does mean is that we are justified in relying upon reason to give us some standard of measure that is not arbitrary, idiosyncratic or irrelevant. How and why reason and intellect in our souls is able to do that, and the consequences of this, will be the topic of the following chapter.

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[1] In Book IX, for example, the reasoning part of the soul has its own pleasures (*Rep.* 580d) and it is only the knower for whom pleasures might be pure (*Rep.* 583b).

[2] Cf. *Euthyphro* e.g. 6b-c, *Apology* 26b-c, *Phaedo* 118a, *Phaedrus* 229c *ff.*

[3] E.g. 16c5-7, e3 (Divine Method), 18b5-6 (Theuth), 20b3-4 (The Dream), 22c5-6 (divine mind), 25b-c (prayer for the mixed class), 26b7-c1 (goddess saves pleasure), 28a4-30d4 (cosmology), 33b (Divine Life), 39e-40b (Good Man Argument), 61b-c (mixing the good life), 66b4 (ranking reason), 66c-d (Orpheus and

Zeus the Saviour).

[4] For some suggestions of general answers, see e.g. Taylor [1956] 35.

[5] There is, of course, the approach to reading a Platonic dialogue which would dismiss any such comments as just so much literary window-dressing. Through close attention to the use and effect of these references, I hope to dispel this inclination and to show how taking the 'literary flourishes' seriously can pay off philosophically.

[6] D. Frede [1993], pg. 23, n. 1

[7]Hackforth [1945], pg. 48, n. 3

[8] Vlastos [1991] tells us that *Socrates*, at least, 'subscribes unquestioningly to the age-old view that side by side with the physical world accessible to our senses, there exists another, populated by mysterious beings, personal like ourselves' (pg. 158).

[9] This may explain Hackforth's conjecture that the goddess referred to may be Harmonia.

[10] In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates is concerned at 10a-11b with the question of whether 'the good' is *whatever* the gods happen to love, or whether instead the gods are made, by the goodness of good things, to love them.

[11] This latter passage will be discussed in Chapter 6.

[12] Bodies of knowledge and other intelligible entities in the epistemology and methodology of 15a-18d; 'right combinations of opposites' in the metaphysics of 23c-27b.

[13] disconnected or irrelevant bits of 'knowledge' that youths and sophists use to torment their victims (15e, 17a); non-entities such as hot and cold, double, or random concatenations of such things in the metaphysics.

[14] This Trial of Lives will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5, section VII.

[15] Cf. Chapter 2, section II (D) on concepts and classes.

[16] This topic will be treated in Chapter 6.

[17] Cf. Sedley [1998], who brings the point out nicely.

[18] Taylor [1956], 37, says the suggestion is a joke (because mind causes *everything*, even destruction), while Hackforth [1945], 44 n. 1 maintains that it must be meant seriously; D. Frede [1993], 19 n. 1 claims that the causes of disintegration are simply too manifold to be classified.

[19] Cf. Chapter 2

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[20] The second occurrence is the much cited *genesin eis ousian*, about the significance of which commentators are divided. Hackforth [1945] calls Grube as an ally, to argue that not too much weight should be laid on this peculiar phrase – '*genesis eis ousian* need not mean anything more than *genesis* alone' (49 n. 2). D. Frede [1993] grants we ought not make too much of the expression, but I think rightly replies that we should also not make too little of it (lvii n. 3).

[21] Cf. e.g. Bolton [1975]. We might think of the distinction codified at *Timaeus* 28a-29c.

[22] We have looked, in Chapter 2, at why it is not necessary, and why an alternative would be preferable. The full extent of the alternative reading of *genesis* will not become clear until the discussion of false pleasure, addressed in Chapter 4.

[23] After all, if the same thing (mind, in this case) explains one thing (generation) and its opposite (decay), then we have not found the actual explanation at all. Cf. Hankinson [1998].

[24] One of the prominent examples of a thing suitable for treatment by the Divine Method (17b11-e6), music is redescribed in similar terms as metaphysically a combination of limit and unlimitedness of particular kinds at 26a.

[25] Or perhaps not so strange or out of place, if we follow Vlastos [1991] in supposing that for Socrates 'the highest form of wisdom is not theoretical but practical' (pg. 164).

[26] Divinity generally, that is, as opposed to the particular personified deities of the traditional pantheon.

[27] In what follows, I am indebted to M. M. McCabe's discussion of these issues. (McCabe [2000], Chapter 6.)

[28] 'How can there be purity in the case of whiteness,' Socrates asks. 'Is it the greatest quantity or amount, or is it rather the complete lack of any admixture, that is, where there is not the slightest part of any other kind contained in this colour?' (53a4-7). Endorsing Protarchus' choice for the latter, Socrates adds that the purest is 'the truest and most beautiful of all instances of white, rather than what is greatest in quantity or amount' (53a9-b2). The same will hold of pleasure (53c1-3).

[29] The actual claim is put rhetorically: 'is not the fire that belongs to us small in amount, feeble and poor, while the fire in the universe overwhelms us by its size and beauty and by the display of all its power?. . .Is the fire in the universe generated, nourished, and ruled by the fire that belongs to us, or is it not quite the reverse, that your heat and mine, and that in every animal, owe all this to the cosmic fire?' (29c).

[30] Purity will take on increasing significance as the dialogue progresses. Cf. Chapter 6.

[31] Famously, in the *Meno*, Socrates claims not to know what virtue is by being given a whole swarm of virtues (72b-d), and in the *Theaetetus*, the young mathematician is commended for his generosity, but not for his helpfulness, in naming several different kinds of knowledge (146d-e). The problem in each case with this approach is presumably *not* that we might learn nothing by reflecting upon particular kinds of the thing in question – Socrates himself uses this method, using cobblers and cooks to illustrate his points, much to the annoyance of Callicles. The inadequacy of these answers seems rather to lie in the fact that what is to count as an instance, and why all of *these* should do so, will not become any clearer by looking at the instances (that is, the various kinds or 'parts') themselves.

[32] This technique of making a pragmatic alliance with someone whose position is importantly distinct from his own will recur in the discussion of false pleasures. At 44d Protarchus is invited to take the extreme haters-of-pleasure as allies (*summachous* at 44d7 echoing the *summachos* of 30d8), although Socrates is careful not to endorse their views. Cf. Chapter 5, section XII.

[33] This might seem a more likely description of the project of the *Timaeus*. I think, though, that the *Timaeus* shares the *Philebus'* principle of priority when it sets about inferring what any creator's intentions must have been by trying to discern in the first place what is good and reasonable. (Cf. *Timaeus* 30a *ff.*)

[34] This would be to take the alternative offered in the *Euthyphro* that pious is just whatever the gods happen to love. Whatever it is we discover the gods love, we will call that pious.

[35] Discussed in Chapter 2.

[36] The discussion of whiteness at 53a *ff.* aligns 'purity' with a thing being itself – and the *kath 'auto* language, used in earlier dialogues to describe the nature of Forms, reappears here. Cf. Fine [1984] esp. 60-61; Owen [1965]. (This will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6.) While it is true of anything that its identity will be captured in its being exactly and only what it is, with complex entities the 'purity' thus involved seems less obvious, or even downright problematic. Considering its parts, or components, a complex entity will seem not to be simply and purely what it is. It is only when the complexity involved is considered as a unified whole – with its own identity in its own right (and not merely derived from parts being added to one another), that the complex unity can be considered to have its own purity.

[37] Depending, of course, upon how one reads the account of reincarnation in the *Timaeus*, which purports to explain all non-human animals as degenerate incarations of the indestructible bits of human souls (*Tim.* 90e-92c). The indestructible soul created by the Demiurge includes at least intellect (*Tim.* 41b-d), which

would seem to imply that even fish (91b) and other lowly creatures (42c-d) possess intellect (even though they do not – even *cannot* – use it?). There may be also a difference between something which 'possesses intellect' by being a well-ordered unity, and something which 'possesses intellect' by being a well-ordered unity which, in virtue of its good order, is itself capable of creating good order. (In an inversion of the Aristotelian senses of the terms, the first would be intellect manifested [actually existing], expressed in the unity of the organism, while the intellect of human souls is both of this kind and of another 'potential' kind, in virtue of its existing also as a capacity for creating and recognising good order.)

[38] In the *Phaedo*, a version of the idea is introduced by Simmias (85e-86d) and rejected by Socrates (92a-95a).

[39] In the final ranking of goods, or causes of goodness (66a-c), it seems that the normative notions of measure, proportion, due measure and the like are supposed to do the work, together with mind, which presumably is able to be a cause of goodness by making its judgements with reference to such normative principles. Cf. Chapter 7.

[40] Aristotle's investigation into substance in *Metaphysics Z, H and Θ* insists that it is not a search into being or into unity, but into the cause of anything's 'being one' or unified – being a 'this' is a complex affair, whose complexity demands an explanation, or cause.

[41] This is another indication that the 'cause of these generations' is not the efficient cause of physical coming-into-being; my intellect, after all, does not bring it about – efficient causation – that I am born.

[42] In answer to the dilemma set out earlier: it is to be noted that one crucial step in the argument was that souls *qua* souls implied intellect, and this throws us back upon the choice between soulless and intellective animals. Contrary to McCabe [2000], who argues that 'soul' is meant here in a quite restrictive sense, I'd rather impale myself on the second horn. On the one hand, we can gather from the *Timaeus* that the notion that animals have some sort of intellect in their soul could not have been absolute anathema to Plato. More pertinent to the passage under discussion, however, if it is not the case that bodies – in order to be living bodies at all – must have souls, then it is difficult to see how the macro-microcosm argument is to get started. We are agreed already that intellect is implied by having soul; if, in addition, soul is implied by having body, then to use soul in a restricted sense would amount to denying animals soul. And this, it seems, would have to end by denying animals *bodies* properly so-called – for whatever had body, had soul. If there is no soul, then there is no body, and the good order of the universe looks as if it is getting rather

thin. Does this mean a down-graded sense of intellect? Perhaps it implies an intellect that is not reflective and self-aware, yet nonetheless is effective – it effectively ensures order without self-consciously reflecting upon it, or deliberating and choosing it over disorder.

[43] This echoes his earlier reluctance to go along with the conventional identification of Aphrodite as the goddess of Pleasure.

[44] Cf. Hackforth [1965], who takes the opposite view.

[45] Of course, this does not account for why *Protarchus* – or someone similarly inclined – would think it unseemly; even though his comment occurs after the cosmological argument, it would be a bit much to presume that we are to take Protarchus to have been wholly converted to Socrates' way of considering god. Protarchus' reasons for denying that the gods experience pleasure has much more to do with the particular conception of pleasure expounded by Socrates, and would thus be vulnerable to challenges by – say – Aristotle, that pleasure is in fact something quite different, and therefore suited to godliness.

[46] It is interesting to consider whether Daniel Dennet's defence of evolutionary theory (Dennett [1995]) might in fact leave space for such isomorphism between the structure of thought and the structure of reality.

[47] The way that this makes mind pervasive within us will be treated in the following chapter. The concluding chapter will take up the way that mind, as a unity within and around us, forms a vital axis between our particular circumstances and the nature of reality.

[48] Contra Hampton [1990].

[49] Does the receptacle of the *Timaeus* (*Tim.* 49a *ff.*) provide a standing source of disorganisation? Or once order has been introduced does it merely provide the opportunity and limits of change from one ordered state to another?

[50] In the surprise ending, first prize goes to 'what is somehow connected with measure' (66a8), while second prize is awarded to 'the well-proportioned and beautiful, the perfect, the self-sufficient, and whatever else belongs in that family' (66b1-2). (Cf. Chapter 7) This does not mean that the actual source is not 'the good itself', after all. The ranking of sources of value at the end of the *Philebus* is an attempt to make the route to and sources of goodness as articulated as possible. They are not exactly an attempt to define the good, but rather one articulation of the relevant features of the good and our relations to it, which is perhaps as abstract and sophisticated – therefore as explanatory – as one can get *without* invoking

the (transparently true, but rather unhelpful) good itself.

[51] This ranking will be the subject of Chapter 7.

[52] *Phaedrus* 229c-230a

[53] Vlastos [1991] presents an interesting attempt to reconcile Socrates' rationalism with his piety.

Inasmuch as it is by making the gods *morally* rational (that is, good and consistent, and not just clever and powerful) that Socrates is supposed to achieve this synthesis, this seems in keeping with the approach Plato presents Socrates as taking in the *Philebus*. However, if the *Philebus* is addressing such a view at all, it is by insisting that the distinction between 'morally rational' and 'merely rational' is mistaken. Hence the prominent role of the epistemology and metaphysics in the account of reason and judgement.

[54] Vlastos [1991] 158

[55] This is Hackforth's [1965] view of the *Timaeus*, into which he fits the account of mind in the *Philebus*.

[56] But see Fine [1984], [1989].

[57] Both the traditional reading of the myth, which supposes the age of Kronos is regarded wistfully and nostalgically, and the revised reading advocated by Brisson [1995] support the transcendent, divine-shepherd view of Plato's notion of the divine. (See also Rowe [1995], who endorses Brisson's reading.) On the latter view, the time of Zeus (under which we live) is marked by the governance of a god unconcerned with human affairs, a transcendent god withdrawn. (Cf. Erler [1995].)

[58] In this I am unpersuaded by Brisson's reading.

[59] Cf. McCabe [1997]

[60] And in the *Timaeus*, even when the physicist-astronomer makes his account of the universe more complex (at 48e), the Craftsman-creator still does not appear amongst the kinds of existing things.

[61] Cf. McDowell [1994].

Chapter 4

The Significance of Pleasure

I. Introduction

By the time we get to the *Philebus*, we might begin to think that Plato had some sort of obsession with the figure of the hedonist and with the thesis of hedonism. In the *Republic*, hedonism is virtually equated with all-out moral scepticism.[1] The convinced proponent of hedonism in the *Gorgias* is ridiculed into submission,[2] and has arguably been able to sustain the interest of moral philosophers over the ages precisely to the degree that pleasure was clearly *not* the only, or the ultimate, value he held. Socrates is given the hedonist thesis to defend in the *Protagoras*[3] – which he does adeptly: with elegant perversity, he defends hedonism in order to justify a kind of Socratic rationalism in ethics, thus giving birth to the more sanitary doctrine of 'enlightened' hedonism.

A simple explanation of this interest in hedonism might be that the hedonist thesis is, unexpectedly, a bit too uncomfortably close to Plato's own position. Both the hedonist and Plato, we might think, are consequentialist in their approach to ethics[4] – they largely agree on how to go about thinking about value, and on the kind of thing the good, or a source or justification of value, has to be. But where Plato points to some irreducible, possibly transcendent 'good' by way of explanation, the hedonist points to pleasure.[5] And especially because his own answer is so uninformative, the hedonist's more accessible explanation of value amounts to a serious threat to the plausibility of Platonic ethics. So Plato must work very hard to undermine the attractiveness of hedonism, and at the same time must give a

more specific picture of the alternative end that he has in view.

I think that this explanation is not just mistaken – it also distorts what is most interesting and valuable in Plato's approach to ethics. Such a view is hard put to make sense of some of the more famous features of Plato's idealism – that the good man benefits (himself and others); that it is worse to do than to suffer injustice; that the Form of the Good is the source of unity and being. What this consequentialist explanation of Plato's *eudaimonism* also obscures is the quite general interest that Plato had in pleasure. Even when his topics are not immediately concerned with hedonism, Plato is constantly aware of the power of pleasure and pain, and curious about what kind of value for, or place within, a human life they might therefore have. Whether talk is of art, politics, rhetoric, physics, or education, pleasure has a way of creeping into the conversation.[6] Not only can we educate ourselves in pleasure and pain – it is vital that we do so. But far from simply asserting that the good man takes pleasure in the right things, at the right time, to the right degree,[7] Plato is interested in the psychology of human beings that could make this so. If pleasures can be accessible to, and even altered by reason – if, that is, they can be *educated*, and not just tyrannically repressed – then what does this tell us about human psychology (including perception and sensation and reason) and about desire and value generally?

If we press on this aspect of his thought, we see that Plato's opposition to pleasure was not motivated by quite the same worries that drove Kant's opposition to 'eudaimonism'.[8] For Kant, pleasures and pains – *and so* 'happiness' generally – are utterly idiosyncratic, and this suffices to disqualify them as the core of a viable ethical outlook.[9] It is the very 'personalness' of pleasures that make them an unreliable guide to the right, and an inadequate source of justification of right. This, however, leads to a disconcerting kind

of impersonality in Kantian ethics.[10] Plato's objections to pleasure are somewhat different. It is, I shall argue, precisely the personalness of pleasure, its location within a particular person or character, which will be, if anything is, its salvation. Locating pleasure within the context of a particular person does not mean abandoning pleasure and pain to a hopeless idiosyncraticity – instead it is just this, if anything, that will provide pleasure the opportunity to contribute substantially to the goodness of a human life. In order to see these issues more clearly, Plato devotes an uncommon attention to the kind of phenomena pleasure and pain are for human beings.

Generally, it is taken for granted that we all more or less know already what we are talking about: pleasure is just that sensation, whatever it may feel like in each case, that makes us go 'mmm....'; pain is the opposite. If the actual sensation is not the same in each case, then pleasure and pain are defined simply in terms of desire.[11] Plato, by contrast, goes carefully over these issues – what are pleasure and pain? Is pleasure some one thing? How does it relate to desire, to belief, to motivation, to action? He invites us to understand the relation between pleasure and desire the other way round – pleasure is not to be defined irreducibly in terms of whatever sensations are desired; rather desire is to be understood in terms of what pleasure and pain are for creatures like us. And as he pays closer attention to these questions, his objections to it – and his overall evaluation of pleasure and pain – become more precise. Pleasure is not simply a threat to a good human life because we are all, *qua* animals, attracted to it without regard to other goods – if that were the case, either the enlightened hedonism of the *Protagoras*, which puts calculation in the service of pleasure, would be the final word on these matters;[12] or, rejecting that alternative, we would be forced, like Kant, to come up with an account of morality that is totally (and

unrealistically) divorced from pleasure.[13] In fact, pleasure is interesting, if it is, because we can find that on consideration we do not have to be forced into this unappetising dichotomy.

In what follows, I shall argue that Plato's treatment of pleasure brings it within the compass of a strongly cognitivist moral psychology. This will not mean that there is nothing but cognition to pleasures, that pleasures are all just so many more thoughts. But it does mean that if there is an explanation of pleasure, of what role it can play in a human life, then this will grow up within the rationalist framework. At the same time, the cost of rejecting this framework is spelled out;[14] later, the cost of accepting such an approach to pleasure will prove to be not as objectionable as the defender of pleasure might have supposed.[15]

II. Nature of the Investigation

Although Plato begins the dialogue with Socrates declaring and assigning positions to be argued for and defended, the precise aim of the dialogue is yet riddled with an important ambiguity from the outset. We know that we are looking for a good *diathesis* or *hexis* of the *psyche*; but until Socrates relates to us the discussion he once heard in a dream (20b *ff.*), it is unclear whether we are looking for something that is good, or for something that can only be good, or for *the* state or condition (or *kind* of state) of the soul that counts as being *eudaimon*.

But in the Trial of Lives (20c-23b) – the very passage which clarifies the aim of the dialogue, and sets the standards which any viable candidate for *eudaimonia* will have to live up to (20d) – the issue is immediately resolved in favour of neither candidate, and the aim of the discussion adjusted and reformulated. The only thing sufficient and complete enough to count as *the* good for human beings is found to be neither pleasure nor knowledge, but rather

a mixture of the two. It is, in particular, the mixed *life*, which is judged to be *the* good – and neither interlocutor seems disturbed by the fact that a 'state or disposition of the soul' and an entire human life seem just categorically two different kinds of things.[16] Their attention instead turns immediately to defending their chosen candidates in a new contest – now the dispute is over which of the two contestants is either most like, or most responsible for, the goodness in a human life, that is for the mixed life itself. Refusing to quibble with Philebus over the place of divine intellect (22c3-8), Socrates says:

> We have rather to look and make up our minds about second prize, how to dispose of it, one of us may want to give credit for the combined life to reason, making it responsible, the other to pleasure. Thus neither of the two would be the good, but it could be assumed that one or the other of them is its *cause*. But I would be even more ready to contend against Philebus that, whatever the ingredient in the mixed life may be that makes it choiceworthy and good, reason is more closely related to that thing and more like it than pleasure. (22c8-e2)

But the fact that the human good was found to be a life, not a momentary state, does have important implications. Among them is the discovery – manifested mostly in Protarchus' distaste for what Socrates calls the life of a mollusc (21c7) – that human beings are essentially continuous beings, in two different ways. In the first place, and most obviously, human experience – unlike that of molluscs – is characterised by a non-contingent, or integrated sort of continuity. Human beings do not (normally) have temporal slices of experiences (or experiential states) piled on top of one another. They have memories, hopes and desires which tie their past and future integrally into the fabric of their present situation, or state.

There is in the second place, then, a related but different kind of continuity – what we might call 'atemporal continuity'. This is not a matter of continuity *over* time, but of unity and cohesion at any particular time.[17] Memory, hope, perception, desire, pain, judgement are not separate and distinct faculties that happen every now and again to coincide, to occur alongside each other. They cannot be isolated, identified separately, and reintroduced into quite different circumstances and contexts without any change to the kind of thing they are.[18] We can appreciate this by engaging in the thought experiment Socrates suggests (20e4-21d1), trying to imagine what pleasure, utterly devoid of any cognitive capacities at all, would be like. When this vision of pleasure disintegrates into an unappetising morass, we are invited to examine mind and knowledge, also in isolation. The joyless life of pure intellect is, equally, scarcely recognisable. Pleasure is for us the kind of thing it is partly because it is related to the sort of judgement, memory and other capacities we, as human beings, characteristically have. Likewise, our capacity for judgement is, in its turn, what it is for us partly in virtue of the fact that it is human judgement, related to and informed in certain regular ways by human desires, imaginations, and even to a human body. The fact that a human soul has all of these various possibilities thus determines the nature of these possibilities themselves.[19]

In terms of the *Philebus*, we might say that a human being is a complex whole. Besides asserting this explicitly (but without exploring it) in the introduction to the Divine Method[20] – where 'man' appears on the list of problematic *monads* (15a4) – Socrates has gone on to treat human beings as ordered and complex in the 'cosmological argument' (29e-30b).[21] There, after discussing the composition of our bodies, he suddenly begins to speak of 'us' in terms of limit, unlimitedness, and cause. By implication, human beings must be

'mixtures' of the relevant kind (normative, complex, intelligible, identifiable), or else the sudden re-introduction of *peras* and *apeiron* has no place in the argument at all. But complex wholes, we know already from the methodological passage, are to be understood 'top down', or rather from whole to part – what the parts are, what they can mean, and how they relate to one another is to be understood in terms of the whole; the whole, by contrast, is not to be thought of as being assembled out of finished and impermeable fragments that turn out later, only in retrospect, to be 'its parts'.[22] This means that, like all wholes, human beings and human souls are not an accumulation either of moments or of faculties or of states.[23] Rather the nature (identity or character) of the faculties, moments or states is to be understood secondarily, insofar as it fits into (or fails to), is constitutive of, contributes to, or is part of the larger whole (the relations may differ, it seems; and which of these relations it is will matter). The soul may not be a harmony; but a person is still like *music* (the *monad*).[24] Plato's moral psychology in the *Philebus*, that is, fits with, and follows from, his general metaphysical account.

Thus, if we try to explain the soul or its parts by starting with pleasure, sensation, perception, memory, desire, knowledge, etc. – assuming we can identify them separately and out of context like this – we will never be able to create from these pieces an adequate picture or understanding. For we cannot *start* from these points at all. They can not be investigated in isolation and then be trusted to retain some fixed identity when they are fitted together. Only with respect to a determinate kind of soul of a living creature can we have a sufficient idea of what will constitute that soul and consequently what each constituent might be like.[25] If it is pleasure in the human soul we are trying to understand, then we must try to understand what pleasure is *for human beings*. And pleasure for humans will not be

the same as pleasure as experienced by other kinds of beings capable of feeling pleasure (say, molluscs).[26] Because it is an experience within a creature capable of memory and projection, even the most basic (and base) pleasures will be distinctively human. The possibilities for the nature and complexities of pleasure – and of each of the other faculties in turn – will be altered, and determined, simply in virtue of the fact that it exists within the context of a being which has certain other capacities of particular kinds. This becomes apparent first in the Trial of Lives, and is pursued further, and in more detail, first in the general discussion of the nature of pleasure, and then in the discussion of the various ways in which pleasure can be false.

III. Pleasure and the Apeiron

The third attempt to get at an adequate understanding of pleasure is more subtle than the two preceding, and proceeds more cautiously.[27] The entire discussion since the end of the Trial of Lives, where the agenda for the remainder of the dialogue is set anew (22d-e), has been leading to this question, setting up tools with which, and a framework within which, to come to terms with the complicated issue properly. So when Socrates finally turns himself to address questions left unresolved concerning the nature of pleasure (and specifically, what kind of unity it has), there is by now already an important qualification built in: we are to discuss pleasure generally, but our interest is in what pleasure is for human beings – and we have no reason to suppose, and every reason not to suppose, that this will be the same for all creatures capable of experiencing pleasure.

After dividing everything existing now in the universe into four kinds, Socrates led the classification of each of the candidates for the good in human life (27c-31b). The 'first

prize winner', the mixed life, was classed easily enough amongst the *meikta*. Socrates goes through a lengthy, and somewhat odd, procedure in order to locate his own candidate for second prize in the fourth class, *cause*.[28] But in this part of the discussion, it was pleasure that got short shrift. Although he has repeatedly disavowed responsibility for the direction of the discussion (12b1-2, 19a by his silence) and for the commitments made by Protarchus (12a8-9), it is nevertheless to Philebus that Socrates turns when trying to secure agreement about the kind of thing pleasure is.

Obstreperous Philebus is uncharacteristically obliging. Without hesitation, he replies emphatically to Socrates' question: 'Certainly [pleasures are of] the sort that admit the more, Socrates!' His argument for this, however, is lamentably bad. 'For how,' he continues, 'could pleasure be all that is good if it were not by nature boundless in plenty and increase?' (27e8-10). Not only is there no reason to suppose that quantity equals quality – the radical hedonist rather helps himself to this thesis that if something is good, more of it must be better;[29] more seriously, as Socrates is quick to point out, relying on this thesis as a *reason* for a thing's goodness runs into trouble even on the hedonist's terms. 'Nor, on the other hand, would pain be all that is bad, Philebus!', he replies to the hedonist. 'So we have to search for something besides its unlimited character that would bestow on pleasures a share of the good' (28a1-3). If, that is, the hedonist's *reason* for supposing pleasure is the good is the simple fact that it could be increased without bound, then he would have likewise to hold that pain is just as good – for it, too, by the hedonist's own lights, can increase without bound. Clearly, the hedonist cannot suppose that boundlessness justifies goodness.

Nevertheless, whatever his reasons for supposing pleasure to be the good, the hedonist *does* think (when he thinks at all) that there can always be more and more of it, and the more of it

there is, the better.[30]

Socrates, of course, does not share the hedonist's view of pleasure.[31] He may or may not think that pleasure could, in principle or in practice, be increased without bound. He certainly would not agree that this feature explains its choiceworthiness. But the only reason Philebus offered for supposing that pleasure *did* admit of 'the more' was that this characteristic would explain pleasure's desirability. Socrates, then, cannot have had Philebus' reasons for supposing that pleasure is *apeiron*. Yet, he allows the classification to go through without quibble. Either it was cheating on his part suddenly to call on Philebus to answer the question – when we know already that the hedonist cannot be bothered to think terribly clearly about these things, and when we have moreover every reason to suspect that Philebus has not been following the preceding discussion of metaphysics with very much attention or comprehension – or else there are other reasons, from the point of view of the rationalist perspective Socrates represents, for supposing that pleasure is indeed properly characterised as belonging to the unlimited. Socrates is not forthcoming at this point with any alternative reasons to think that pleasure must be *apeiron*. So does he have any? And if so, what are they?

The rationalist's reasons for classing pleasure amongst unlimited things first begin to come to light as the analysis of pleasure gets underway (31b *ff.*). Socrates begins with a consequence that would follow, if pleasure were something *apeiron*; he then offers a model of pleasure by way of explanation. 'We will not be able to provide a satisfactory examination of pleasure,' he claims (31b5-7), 'if we do not study it together with pain.' Besides his throwaway comment to Philebus on the classification of pleasure as a whole, this is the first mention of pain, and the first suggestion that it must necessarily be taken into

consideration in any account of the nature of pleasure. But if we have taken seriously the fact that pleasure was declared to be *apeiron*, this revelation should come as no surprise. Although the characteristic mark of the *apeiron* was that it admitted 'the more and the less', even this description betrays already another peculiarity of that class. Lacking any definition or limit in itself, or by its own nature, things in the class of the unlimited can first be seen for what they are in the light of their opposite. 'Hot', in and of itself, just means 'hotter than (something) colder'. If pleasure does indeed belong to the *apeiron*, then without further determination it can be identified only as 'more pleasant than something more painful'.[32]

IV. Sketch of a Theory of Pleasure – Pleasure and Nature

'Nature' is, in a sense at least, a normative concept for Plato. In the language of the *Philebus*, the nature of a thing is the peculiar unity of limit and unlimited, or the structure, that constitutes it.[33] Living things are wholes, and have natures in this sense – as could be inferred from the inclusion of 'man' and 'ox' on the short sampler list of '*monads*', unities, at 15a4-5. The nature of a living thing will be 'what it is to be' that living thing, and it will be a good thing for anything which belongs to the kind of things which have natures[34] to exemplify that right measure and due proportion so far as is possible. It is both a definition and an aspiration – it is a definition, a standard, and *therefore* an aspiration, the terms in which success, as well as identity, are measured.[35] This normativity of wholes could be deduced from the methodological and metaphysical discussions of the dialogue, which have preceded the discussion of pleasure.

It is striking, then, that Plato's first definition of pleasure is in terms of nature. And by beginning the discussion in the widest terms possible, he places our understanding of

nature solidly within the broader metaphysical and epistemological framework already set out. 'Pleasure and pain seem to me by nature to arise together in the common kind' (that is, the mixed class; 31c). This is further elaborated:

> What I claim is that when we find the harmony of living creatures disrupted, there will at the same time be a disintegration of their nature and a rise of pain. . .But if the reverse happens, harmony is regained and the former nature restored, we have to say that pleasure arises, if we must pronounce only a few words on the weightiest matters in the shortest possible time. (31d4-10)

But if it is good for one to be in that state which is naturally complete, and pleasure is felt when we are moving towards that state, then it will be awkward at this point to claim that pleasure is *bad*. It is at least an indication, or a symptom, of something good (namely, improvement). This concession to the hedonist of an intimate link between pleasure and normativity may seem a damning one to Socrates' position. Against the hedonist, one wants ordinarily to show that pleasure is – or at least can be – bad, and conceding a connection between pleasure and naturally good states may seem to start the rationalist at a disadvantage in this project. Socrates seems at least to be stacking the deck against himself in his very definition of pleasure.

This feature of pleasure, though, far from embarrassing or being repudiated by the rationalist is actually exploited in various ways in order to make the rationalist point more forcefully. Over the course of the discussion this characterisation will allow Plato to acknowledge and explain the attractiveness of pleasure, without endorsing it. For rather than defining pleasure as a movement towards the good (and therefore a good movement), Plato has in fact only indicated the place and circumstances under which it would be

appropriate to feel pleasure – thus actually establishing the possibility that it could be *inappropriate* to feel pleasure. At the same time, linking pleasure to awareness or perception of such a change[36] begins the work of drawing out how trenchantly cognitive even pleasure is – and therefore how it can go wrong.

Thus, Socrates carefully does not *identify* disintegration and restoration with pain and pleasure respectively – the first pair are the occasion for the second.[37] And it will be important in the end that restoration is not strictly identified with pleasure, and disintegration with pain, for it will allow space for some notion of a pleasure that is not partially conditioned by pain.[38] It will be 'unfelt lacks' – and *therefore* not pain (51b5-6) – that occasion pure pleasures; so that we must suppose the pain consists in *feeling* the lack, pleasure in perception of the restoration. It is perception, or awareness, that makes all the difference.[39]

Plato, however, begins his discussion of pleasure in the *Philebus* by inviting us to make just the identification between restoration and pleasure that will prove inadequate; only further discussion then gradually makes our understanding of pleasure more sophisticated. Thus to begin with, the examples that Socrates chooses to illustrate his characterisation of the circumstances which give rise to pleasure vividly recall the *Gorgias* (492-497). The 'refilling' model of pleasure was there, and is here, drawn from the common and natural pleasures of eating and drinking.[40] 'Hunger, I take it is a case of disintegration and pain. . .And eating, the corresponding refilling, is a pleasure?' (31e6, e8).[41] This is a most facile notion of pleasure and pain, and Plato shows that he is aware of this when he later refers back to this preliminary characterisation in order to revise it. 'Are we agreed,' Socrates asks, after discussing memory, perception, and desire, 'that hunger and thirst and

many other things of this sort are desires?' (34d10-e1). And, in contrast to the physical depletion and replenishment involved in nourishment, 'our argument will, then, never allow that it is our body that experiences thirst, hunger, or anything of that sort' (35d5-6). Pleasure and pain are not so simple as the mere filling of a 'hole', nor are hunger and thirst even properly characterised as pains. They are, as shall be made explicit later, desires for specific experiences.[42] But if it glosses over the subtleties of the experience of pleasure and pain, the refilling model does at least serve as a vivid illustration of what could be meant by a 'disintegration' and 'restoration' of a living being's 'nature'. We can make ordinary sense of what it is to 'have a proper nature' simply by looking at our presumptions around everyday phenomena of thirst and hunger, of drinking and eating.

The final characterisation of pleasure as *genesis*,[43] which concludes the examination of pleasure and pain (554d-55c), might be thought to reiterate the description of pleasure as a refilling.[44] But in fact these two notions must not be taken as equivalent – rather it is 'refilling' that *leads into* our conception of *genesis*. But this will only become clear by following the development of the argument. Although Plato does indeed insist that pleasure is a *genesis*, a coming-into-being, his early examples of the pleasures of eating and drinking serve primarily as concrete illustrations of what is ultimately an ontological point. Despite the first examples, the *Philebus* should not be read as a replay of the *Gorgias* in new, fashionable attire. The *Philebus* is taking up where the *Gorgias* left off not just dramatically, but also philosophically, starting with simplistic notions of pleasure which turn out to be inadequate, in order to work towards a more sophisticated view. The very fact that the *Gorgias* is in the background alerts us to the subtler character of the *Philebus'* account.[45]

V. Human Pleasures

Beginning with hunger and thirst, Socrates goes out to meet the hedonist on his own ground. For the simplistic model of pleasure is just the sort of thing the sophisticated hedonist needs pleasure to be if he is going to draw support for his doctrine from any purported fact that 'all animals by nature seek pleasure and avoid pain'.[46] But after starting out on safe and familiar territory, the hedonist will feel the ground slowly shift underneath him.[47] For the moment, 'We accept this as one kind of pleasure and pain, what happens in either of these two kinds of processes' (32b6-7). With this broad and provisional definition of pleasure in hand, Socrates turns now to a quite different kind of pleasure.

Another sort of pleasure will be 'the anticipation by the *soul* itself of these two kinds of experiences; the hope before the actual pleasure will be pleasant and comforting, while the expectation of pain will be frightening and painful' (32b9-c3). That this does indeed constitute a different kind of pleasure and pain is assumed by Protarchus (32c4-5) and confirmed by Socrates (32c6). Even if we doubt whether it is an experience exclusive to human beings, it is at least a sort of pleasure which we would not be likely to attribute to just any creature at all capable of experiencing the first sort of pleasure and pain. For the process by which hopes and fears arise is exceedingly complex. Such a kind of pleasure could only be had by creatures with certain kinds of capacities besides mere sensation. These capacities are several, inter-related and themselves complicated.

For some commentators,[48] this introduction of a second variety of pleasures is the end of the story. There is no unitary account to be given of pleasure, and that is all there is, or need be, to the argument against positing pleasure as the good.[49] But if we think that is what Plato is up to, we make the mistake of supposing that the pleasures and pains of

anticipation can simply be added to the first sort of pleasures described. In fact, by the time the discussion returns to desire, after a detour through the nature of perception and memory, we see that, at least in beings capable of memory and anticipation, even the most banal and natural pleasures are transformed.[50] On the first analysis, thirst was 'a destruction and a pain' (31e10). But after consideration of perception, memory and desire, Socrates suggests that 'we go back to the same point of departure' (34e7). Upon closer inspection, thirst is in fact 'the desire. . .for the filling with drink' (34e13-35a2). As the discussion of false pleasures will further reveal, each of these mental capacities, many of which we might share with various 'beasts of the field', will themselves be made peculiarly human by the fact that we are also beings capable of complex thoughts, judgements, calculations and conjectures.

Socrates begins his elaboration of the second sort of pleasures and pains with the bold claim that 'as for the other kind of pleasure, of which we said that it belongs to the soul itself, it depends entirely on memory' (33c5-6). To make sense of the claim, of course, we must first understand what memory is. And to do that, Socrates says, we must first come to understand perception. Without getting into the physical mechanics of how our five senses work (that is business for the *Timaeus*), Socrates begins his description at the point where the body has been, somehow or another, affected. There are some affections of the body which we never become aware of, while 'others penetrate through both body and soul and provoke a kind of upheaval that is peculiar to each but also common to both of them' (33d4-5).[51] This is one reason why it turns out to be not quite accurate to refer to the first kinds of pains and pleasures mentioned (hunger and thirst, eating and drinking) as 'bodily pleasures' as opposed to the other 'mental' kind. A physical disruption caused by, say, lack of food would be a *lack*, but it would not yet be *painful* until the effect of the lack was severe

enough to make itself felt in the soul. Because it is not the case that 'all living creatures in all cases notice it whenever they are affected in some way, so that we notice when we grow or experience anything of that sort' (43b1-3); it is only the 'great changes [that] cause pleasures and pains in us, while moderate or small ones engender neither of the two effects' (43c5-6). Like perceptions, even physical lacks and restorations must 'penetrate through both body and soul'; only then does pain or pleasure arise. It is the soul, and not the body alone, that is responsible for any sort of awareness or even sensation.[52]

If, however, 'the soul and body are jointly affected and moved by one and the same affection,' (34a3-4), then perception has occurred. Memory is then defined as the 'preservation of perception' (34a9), and it differs from recollection, which is the activity of the mind of bringing a memory to immediate consciousness. The result is that, although the body alone cannot be responsible for pleasure (or even for sensation), pleasures can arise (provided one *has* a body) due to the soul alone, without the active participation of the body. And this is possible because we have memory and recollection which allow us access to perceptions that have long since passed.

To appreciate the project that Plato is working on, we should notice that he does not just implicitly contrast the pleasures possible for human beings with those possible for other sorts of creatures (molluscs appear in the beginning of the *Philebus* [21c-d], reminding us of the ducks in the *Gorgias* [492e-494b]. Even cattle and horses put in an appearance at the end of the *Philebus* [67b]). He also has Socrates more explicitly juxtapose human pleasures with those of the gods. As we have seen, the gods of the *Philebus* are denied any experience of pleasure whatsoever.[53] According to some, this 'most divine life' (33b6-7), which contains neither pleasure nor pain, should indicate the pleasureless life that Plato himself

really endorses – this is why he calls it godlike – but he is writing the *Philebus* in a more conciliatory mood, and wants to argue for a good enough life for those who cannot see the goodness of this truly good life.[54] But it seems to me rather that Plato would have to convict himself of gross impiety if that were his *real* (but unstated) view. For what makes the painless, pleasureless life most god-like is that it is literally the kind of life that god-like beings would have, precisely and only because such beings, unlike all humans no matter how noble and good, do not have a nature which by its nature is constantly falling away from its own best state. This is especially clear when we bear in mind that it is reason itself which Socrates treats as his 'god'. To suppose that such a god-like life, or even an attempt at it, would be the best-suited for human beings is to arrogate to oneself a perfection that one could not have – it is, that is to say, to make a category error.[55] Good music is measured in terms of what music is, and good pronunciation in terms of phonetics. The desirable ratios, and even the appropriate relata, will not and should not be the same in both cases – even though both are systems of sound. Similarly, human beings, and so being human, just are not the same kind of thing as divine beings.[56] And the same thing that makes it possible for divine beings to be immortal – the fact, that is, that they never fall away from their own perfect state – is the same thing that makes it unseemly for them to experience pleasure (33b10). For human beings on the other hand, since our natures are such that they need restoration, simply in the course of living a good human life, it would be equally unseemly for us *not* to experience pleasure. And Plato will later have Socrates argue against those who conceive of this divine sort of life as the best human one.[57]

Rather than a casual slip, voicing Plato's actual-but-entirely-too-controversial views of the matter, the introduction of the 'third state' here (32e8) should be read as an indication

of the boundaries which circumscribe what might be thought a good human life, the boundaries which will give shape to and determine what it could mean for us to experience pleasure. If we are not to include ourselves among beasts in determining the value of pleasure, neither are we to include ourselves among gods. The insistence here on the possibility of a pleasureless-painless state thus clears space from the very beginning for an argument *against* austerity, which is still to come (42c-44d). If there is a third state we must 'make an effort to keep this fact in mind. For it makes quite a difference for our judgement of pleasure whether we remember that there is such a state or not' (33a3-5). It will mean that pleasure cannot simply be *redefined* as release from pain, and nor therefore will the simply painless state be rightly described as the most pleasant. Socrates will elaborate on this point later (42d8-43d5), in order to distance himself from those who disparage pleasure by saying that 'all pleasures are merely release from pain' (51a2).

V (A). Desires

In order to set in motion the discussion of desire, Socrates turns to his original examples of pains. 'Are we agreed now that hunger and thirst and many other things of this sort are desires?' (34d10-c1). By thus reusing his old examples, he does not try to disguise the fact that there is active revision going on here. One might suppose that this is not actually a revision, but a classification of desire as a *kind* of pain. But if desire is simply classified as a kind of pain, this will leave Socrates' account of pleasure seriously deficient. True pleasures will be contrasted most directly with mixed pleasures (50e *ff.*), which are supposed to fall into three kinds: those which mix a physical pain with a physical pleasure, those which mix a mental pain with a mental pleasure, and those which combine a mental

pleasure or pain with a physical pleasure or pain (46a-47d). But in that passage, in contrast to the other two sorts, Socrates has little to say on the topic of mixed mental and physical pleasures. Instead, he refers back to earlier agreements:

> Now take the cases where the soul's contributions are opposed to the body's: When there is pain over and against pleasures, or pleasure against pain, both are finally joined in a mixed state. We have talked about them earlier and agreed that in these cases it is the deprivation that gives rise to the desire for replenishment, and while the expectation is pleasant, the deprivation itself is painful. When we discussed this we did not make any special mention, as we do now, of the fact that, in the vast number of cases where soul and body are not in agreement, the final result is a single mixture that combines pleasure and pain.' (47c3-d3)

At 34e-35a it was agreed that deprivation gives rise to the desire for replenishment; at 36b, it was agreed that while the expectation of replenishment is pleasant, the deprivation itself is painful. If the reference at 47c4 is *not* back to the discussion of desire at 34d *ff.*, then the clear verbal echoes are pointlessly misleading. More importantly, there is nothing else in the intervening pages that Socrates could be referring back to, and so it would leave him with having had virtually nothing to say about the crucial kind of mixed psychic-somatic pleasures. If we grant that the later description at 47c-d is picking up the earlier discussion of desire at 34d *ff.*, then we must conclude that desire is one of the kinds of mixed pleasures. But because these mixtures are of pleasure and pain, 'at one time the combination of both will be called pleasure; at other times it will be called pain' (46c2-4). It may not, then, be strictly accurate to call desire a kind of pleasure; but neither will it be a kind of pain.

Following the convention of referring to the mixed pleasure-pain states as 'mixed pleasures',

it seems most appropriate to consider desire mixed pleasure.

In looking to see what all the various desires have in common, 'whose recognition allows us to address all these phenomena, which differ so much, by the same name' (34e4-5), Socrates first points out that all desires are for some refilling. 'Whoever among us is emptied, it seems, desires the opposite of what he suffers. Being emptied, he desires to be filled' (35a3-4).[58] But having any relation with something that is not already immediately present – something that is lacking – requires memory. And desire, by definition, relates a soul to something not immediately experienced. Desire, therefore, is not just cognitive because it has an intentional object. It is a disposition of the soul that immediately relates a person to past and future, contains within it a presumption of continuity and relatedness over time. It is at once a recollection and a hope.

To emphasise this, Socrates introduces the problem of one's initial experience of a lack, only to drop it again immediately.

> But what about this problem? If someone is emptied for the first time is there any way he could be in touch with filling, either through sensation or memory, since he has no experience of it, either in the present or ever in the past? (35a6-9)

This looks singularly out of place, and hardly even relevant to the exposition of pleasure, since rather than taking up the problem, Socrates on the contrary never so much as refers to it again.[59]

But the question of original 'emptyings' brings out a point vital to the line of argument. 'Desire,' Socrates is careful to specify, 'is rather of filling' (35b4), not simply of drink. And 'the only option we are left with is that the soul makes contact with the filling, and it clearly must do so through memory' (35b13-c1). So recollection and desire are *both*

of the experience of 'restoration', rather than (or as much as) of the *object* which occasions the experience.[60] Instead of contrasting with one another, recollection and desire seem to run in parallel on these points. But they do not just happen to coincide. Desire is something 'learned' – it is an achievement, of sorts, and complex. For human beings, at least, it is not, as the hedonist appeal to 'all creatures' would suppose, a simple and unmediated reaction to pain. Pleasure, pain and desire are, as soon as we escape the first impressions of infancy, deeply wrapped up on cognition, in memory, conceptions, judgement.[61] The point about people being emptied for the first time is thus a way of asserting that beings without minds cannot have desires, but only pains (and such pains would not be readily recognisable to us as such).

The result of this investigation into desire, perception, memory and recollection is that 'desire is not a matter of the body' (35c7) because 'memory directs it [an impulse] towards the object of its desires' so that 'every impulse, desire, and rule over the whole animal is the domain of the soul' (35d1-3). And while it is true that desire is not a pleasure, or a pleasurable state, it is also not[62] a pain or painful state. Anyone in a condition of emptying or refilling experiences pain or pleasure, respectively. But when someone 'is pained by his condition and remembers the pleasant things that would put an end to the pain, but is not yet being filled' (35e9-10), then he is in a condition 'between' pleasure and pain. The description of one pained by awareness of lack, but recollecting and hoping for what would fill that lack follows directly upon the conclusion that desire is always somehow psychic, and never exclusively somatic. Although Protarchus calls 'the soul's desire caused by the expectation' a pain (36a6), Socrates maintains that so long as one has hope for refilling, then the soul will also experience pleasure in its expectation. 'He enjoys this hope

for replenishment when he remembers, while he is simultaneously in pain because he has been emptied at that time' (36b4-6). Hope is pleasant, the pleasant aspect of desire. Protarchus' mistake allows Socrates to emphasise his point, and again, the emphasis is on the structure of desire. Desire relates us as much toward the future as toward the past. Except in unusual cases of extreme hopelessness, desire is the paradigm example of a state by nature mixed of pleasure and pain – of pleasant hoping and painful appreciation of what is missing.

Desire, that is, is not some mere aimless, nameless drive, nor an automatic reaction to pleasure. It is a cognitive state with an intentional object. And if it has an intentional object, then it will be characterised by how we conceive of things, and by what it is for there to be an object of experience for us. Moreover, it is possible for desire to be partly pleasant because it is inextricably bound up with consciousness, with memory and perception, with recollection and anticipation. Analysing desire in terms of pleasure and pain allows the possibility to open up that the essence of desire is not impulse. Contrary to a view common in moral psychology, impulse is neither the essence nor the distinguishing feature of desire. At the heart of desire is recollection and projection, perception and, for those capable of it, a conception of a better state than that which one is currently experiencing. Desire is an inter-related pleasure-pain pair, and as such it will be subject to all of the varieties and vicissitudes that befall pleasure. If even our most 'basic' pleasures and pains are altered by our capacity to conceive of them, of their objects, and their relations to one another, to our lives and to ourselves, then the same will be true of desire.

Desires are not by any means the only conditions of the soul mixed by nature of pleasures and pains. Certain physical pleasures are possible and intensified only on the condition of a simultaneous pain.[63] The more interesting of the mixed pleasures, however, are those in which the pleasure and pain are both in the soul, rather than in the body. In addition to all manner of desires, the whole complex of emotional life, joys, sorrows, laughter, anger, despair, malice, and so forth are understood in terms of pleasure and pain – which may be one reason why Socrates takes hedonism so seriously.

The final kind of mixed pleasures Socrates describes as 'the common one, where the mixture is the product of affections within the soul itself' (47d8-9), and gives as examples 'wrath, fear, longing, lamentations, love, jealousy, malice, and other things like that' (47e1-2, and 'lamentations and longing' again at 48a1). These are all pains, which are nevertheless 'full of marvellous pleasures' (47e5). Tragedy also mixes laughter and weeping (48a5-6). But these (overlooking love) are all within a limited range of ('negative') emotions. Sensitive to this, Plato has Socrates focus on an emotion ordinarily considered pleasant. 'Look at our state of mind in a comedy. Don't you realise that it also involves a mixture of pleasure and pain?' Socrates asks, and then concedes, 'It is indeed not quite so easy to see that this condition applies under those circumstances' (48a8-9, b1-2). But this is precisely the reason he looks straight to comedy, as he tells Protarchus in conclusion:

> to make it easier to persuade you that there is such a mixture in fear and love and other cases. I hoped that once you had accepted this you would release me from a protracted discussion of the rest. (50d1-3)

But first, because the matter is obscure, and because the validity of his account of the mental and the breadth and power of his account of human psychology hangs on it, Socrates takes

several steps backwards, in order to come at the problem more carefully.

Through a laboriously detailed argument, Socrates shows that a person in the doubly unfortunate position of being both badly off with respect to wisdom (49a1-2), virtue (48e7-9) and self-knowledge generally (48c-d), and being powerless to avenge himself for insults (49b6-8), is ridiculous, a potential object of derision, scorn, and mockery (49c4-5). Malice is defined as a kind of joy at the misfortune of others (48b11-12); it contains more specifically, 'a kind of unjust pain and pleasure' (49d1). We might notice already how much understanding, how much relating and conceptualisation constitute enjoyment of comedy. And because it is not unjust to rejoice at the misfortune of our enemies (49d3-4), malice is a particular kind of enjoyment taken in ridiculous people against whom we have nothing, no just reason to rejoice at their misfortune.[64] Socrates claims,

> Our argument leads to the conclusion that if we laugh at what is ridiculous about our friends, by mixing pleasure with malice, we thereby mix pleasure with pain. For we had agreed earlier that malice is a pain in the soul, that laughing is a pleasure, and that both occur together on those occasions. (50a5-8)[65]

Even if we grant that all comedy has some degree of malice in it, does this yet justify the conclusion Socrates then feels entitled to draw?

> The upshot of our discussion is that in lamentations as well as in tragedies and comedies, not only on the stage but also in all of life's tragedies and comedies, pleasures are mixed with pains, and so it is on infinitely other occasions. (50b1-4)

Tragedy, grief and anger were already agreed from the beginning to be pains which had their share of pleasure in them; so that comedy, and perhaps most laughter generally, was the only bit left to prove. Presumably 'comedy' is a stand-in for the whole range of pleasant

emotions, and the addition of 'all of life's tragedies and comedies' (50b2) broadens the scope of the discussion to include by implication the whole range of emotional life, and not just what happens in the theatre. Mixed pleasures are not the special preserve of the profligate; they are not even necessarily *bad*, unless we want to argue that the whole of our emotional life, from love to joy, from pride to longing to grief, is bad. It would hardly do for Plato to condemn love, for example, which according to him is – or at least can be – our gateway to the good.[66] Emotions might not be themselves a source of value, but they need not be condemned out of hand. They may be neutral, or provide the opportunity for as much good as ill in human life. Or we may find that some or others of them are the inevitable consequences of a good life and a good state of the soul.[67]

What begins to emerge, and will continue to be developed through the discussion of false pleasure, is that what any particular pleasure is, and so whether it is good or not, to be welcomed or not into a good life, is not determined by the sheer fact that it is a pleasure, or even that it is more pleasant than it is painful. It is not even a matter decided by the *kind* of pleasure in question. Both the kind of pleasure and, within any kind, its character and value is decided by memory, mind, intellect, object, context, and relations to things that have or are all of these things.

VI. 'Propositionally' False Pleasures

Plato's approach to moral psychology – to ethics and to philosophy of mind and self – is thus insistently non-agglomerative.[68] Our approach to understanding a *psyche*, its dispositions and experiences, should not treat the soul as a mere bundle of parts.[69] In this the study of the soul fits the general pattern outlined already for the study of any complex

whole. Isolating capacities of the soul, and trying to investigate them adequately once they are thus removed from their context is a hopeless proposition, bound to lead to misconceptions about both the parts, and the whole from which they were originally taken. This is a general methodological point, anticipated in the Divine Method, about what it means to have a single object of inquiry at all. But how and why this is so in particular for the soul comes into focus in the study of the nature of pleasure and pain, and their relation to desire, to memory, perception, and anticipation. The further consequences of insisting upon the unity and integrity of souls will become clear by examining the relation between pleasure, perception, memory, hope and judgement, as they arise in a soul and within a life. This approach, and the results it turns up, will thus be in keeping with the earlier discussions of the normativity of complex wholes.

The methodological point will be crucial to Plato's interest in, and opposition to hedonism. But in order to evaluate the effectiveness of Plato's arguments against hedonism, it is important first to try to clarify further the approach to moral psychology that he presents and endorses. Although he continually manifests his alternative in the way he presents his views on pleasure, this is difficult to extricate from the specific arguments against pleasure as the good, which will be the topic of the next chapter. The first arguments for false pleasure, however, I hope to show, offer a particularly clear instance of Plato's alternative to the agglomerative, or building-blocks approach to psychology. The final characterisation of pleasure generally as *genesis*, I will argue, articulates some of the implications this has for ethics.

In fact, we have already seen that it is not just pain that must be included in any examination of pleasure; to get even the broadest outlines of the topic at hand, Plato feels it

appropriate also first to get clear about the nature of perception, sensation, memory, recollection, and expectation, and how they work together as a whole. Before even embarking on this project, we had to get clear about what a 'whole' is, and how we are to investigate and understand a whole and its parts.[70] Looking more closely at pleasure, however, demands a simultaneous treatment of judgement. This is not just because they may be analogous, so that their similarities and dissimilarities may let each shed light upon the other. This is rather because the very nature of pleasure is altered by the fact that we are also 'judging' creatures. Just as desire was found to be inextricable from memory, pleasure in such creatures cannot help but be bound up intimately with judgement – and for essentially the very same reason.[71] Plato has Socrates make two distinct attempts to articulate the relation between judgement and pleasure. The failure of the first provides us insight into the success of the second. On the basis of this, we are better able to understand the relations between persons and their pleasures – relations which the hedonist will have to deny, or at least ignore, for he cannot explain nor evaluate them.

VI (A). The First Attempt to Relate Pleasure and Judgement

When Protarchus balks at the notion that pleasures could be false, Socrates predicts a 'weighty controversy', telling Protarchus, 'We have to forego any excursions here on any topic of whatever side issues are not directly relevant to our topic' (36d9-10). This is an effective, if not terribly subtle, hint from Plato to his reader that whatever is about to follow, though it might seem far afield, is in fact vital to the investigation into pleasure, and so to settling the disagreement between hedonism and rationalism. What in fact follows will include further thoughts on perception and memory, and attention to judgement and mind, in

an attempt to demonstrate that the 'falsity' at issue is not merely analogous to the falsity we ascribe to beliefs or judgements, merely a metaphor, but is actually the very same kind of falsity. Pleasures, the claim is, do not just come sometimes attached to false beliefs, from which they could – in principle if not in fact – be separated; at least some pleasures are actually constituted by the true or false assessments of reality which on other accounts might be described merely as external causes of the pleasure.[72]

There is a temptation to regard any complex mental entity which includes impulse, desire or sensation in any way at all as simply an amalgam of these two aspects – the 'cognitive' and the desiderative, or impulsive – as if the two could in principle or in definition be separated from one another without losing or changing the identity (or nature?) they had when they existed together. Plato recognises this, which is why he prepared the discussion of pleasure with an elaborate treatment of the metaphysics of wholes and parts and the epistemology and methodology proper to them. But there are many ways to learn a difficult and subtle lesson, and one is by seeing the consequences of the failure to take the point. The analytic approach to mind is appealingly simple, and so a difficult habit to break once acquired. The tactics with which Plato has Socrates begin reveal that he was aware of the seductiveness of this temptation.

Socrates opens the next stage of the argument by suggesting to Protarchus that there is a similarity between judgement and pleasure, with respect to their potential for being either true or false. To Protarchus' sceptical query, 'How could there be false pleasures and pains, Socrates?', Socrates responds rhetorically, 'How could there be true or false fears, true or false expectations, true or false judgements, Protarchus?' (36c7-8). The implication is that judgement, expectation, fears, pleasures and pains can all be either true or false *in just*

the same way, or rather, for just the same reasons. They should not be only metaphorically subject to truth and falsity, but quite literally so.

However, Socrates' response could be elaborated in two ways, one more obvious than the other but unfortunately misguided. It could be that fears, expectations, pleasures and pains can all be right or wrong in the same way that judgement can be right or wrong simply because the only thing that can be right or wrong is the judgement, so that pleasures and pains accompanied by judgement will be true or false *in virtue of* their attaching to a judgement which is either true or false. Such pleasures would be merely 'guilty by association', without actually being themselves altered in any way at all. This is not the only possible, or even only natural, interpretation of Socrates' claim – but taking it this way allows a simple, dichotomous picture of the mental, according to which beliefs are beliefs (and have only to do with getting things about the world right) and desires are desires (and have only to do with making the world be the way I want),[73] regardless of how they are mixed and matched with one another.

Protarchus takes great delight in pointing out to Socrates the inadequacy of such an interpretation. Socrates began by simply drawing a parallel between what judgement is (that it is possible for it to be true and false) and what pleasure is. Protarchus agreed that both judging and pleasure are 'about something' (37a). So, Socrates argues, there is cognitive content to any judgement, and likewise to any pleasure. Pleasure, like judgement, is no mere bodily affection. It is also a movement of the mind that has an intentional object. Pleasure has also this in common with judgement – that, just as one who judges, whether rightly or wrongly, nonetheless judges, so too one who has pleasure, whether rightly or wrongly, still has pleasure (37a10-b3).[74] So with all this in common, with respect to the kind of thing they

are, 'how is it that judgement is usually either true or false, while pleasure admits only truth?' (37b5-6).[75]

But then, just as with his initial attack on pleasure (13b), Socrates gives the game away himself. At Protarchus' agreement that 'it would be impossible [to call pleasure good], if indeed pleasure should be mistaken' (37e8), Socrates replies, 'As to pleasure, it certainly often seems to arise in us not with a right, but with a false, judgement' (37e9-10). Naturally Protarchus points out triumphantly, 'But what we call false in this case at that point is the judgement, Socrates; nobody would dream of calling the pleasure itself false' (38a1-2). Up to this point, Socrates had proceeded very cautiously. He conscientiously insists that we first settle the question of whether pleasure can take on any qualifications at all, before deciding the question about their being able to be qualified as 'good' or 'bad' (37b-c). He is painfully slow in discussing the possibility of judgement, and then of pleasure, being good or bad, right or wrong, mistaken – all leading up to the question of truth and falsity (37d1-e8). The manner is almost comically baroque. Then, suddenly, Socrates gives the game away. Having carefully kept the question of pleasure separate from that of judgement, Socrates himself brings them together – and in just the way certain to undo all the fruit of his previous labours; for his way of relating the two – 'as to pleasure, it certainly often seems to arise in us not with a right, but with a false, judgement' (37e9-10) – suggests that the explanation of the one can be reduced to the explanation of the other. Why does Plato set Socrates up like this?

First, strategically adopting the simple-minded interpretation allows Socrates to impress his point more firmly upon his interlocutor.[76] By stating explicitly the view that pleasure comes with judgement, Socrates has the opportunity to expose the tendency to

suppose that we have to do with (coincidental) conjunction of two quite separate entities, not having anything necessarily to do with one another. *One* of these elements can be false, and as Protarchus eagerly points out, whatever 'sensation' happens to be nearby could be flawed only vicariously, or metaphorically – not *really* flawed at all. That this view should follow is unsurprising, if we take what led up to it as an interpretation of the similarity claim according to which judgement and pleasure are related only analogously or metaphorically.[77]

But what Socrates painstakingly tries to show is that this ready rejoinder relies on the hidden presumption that pleasure is just what it is, pleasure is just pleasure, and insofar as it is pleasure it is all exactly the same as any other. And this presumption is incorrect. In order for the hedonist to prevent the jaws of argument closing in on him, he must retreat to a theory of undifferentiated pleasure. And such a theory of pleasure will not do (12d-13e).[78] He is forced either to resort to vague gestures at desire, now taken as basic – pleasure just is whatever sensations are desired; or else to assert a blanket uniformity of sensation across pleasant sensations, a uniformity flatly out of keeping with actual experience.

But there are other ways of construing the points just agreed upon. The 'analogy', namely, between judgement and pleasure is not really meant to be merely an analogy, and Socrates did not just happen to pick up on judgement because Protarchus agreed judgements could be true or false. Their agreements may also support the view that these are not merely more or less interesting parallels. Pleasure and judgement may have similar features because of a much deeper relationship between them – one which would make it incorrect, perhaps, to explain the mistakenness of pleasure by reference to some 'false judgement' which must have accompanied it (in order for it to be false). According to this other theory

of pleasure, pleasures are not merely differentiated; they are accompanied by judgements which do the work of differentiating of pleasures, by being differentiated themselves. Although pleasure and judgement are different kinds of things, they work together to form a whole in the same way that the body and mind together experience the same pleasure – there is one movement which is 'peculiar to each but common to both'. Once the 'mere conjunction' view has been disposed of, Socrates is free to explore positive alternatives.

VI (B). The Second Attempt to Relate Pleasure and Judgement

Protarchus concedes without hesitation that there is a difference 'between the pleasure that goes with right judgement and knowledge and the kind that often comes to any of us with false judgement and ignorance' (38a6-8).[79] Plato has set Socrates up well to press the claim that the relation between pleasure and judgement is not that of mere 'accompaniment'. For this more sophisticated relation will be argued for by an application of the general methodological lessons learned earlier in the dialogue – a part is to be understood in terms of the whole of which it is a part, and the ways in which it contributes to forming a genuine unity. Identity is not to be ascertained independently and then attached to other separately defined parts. So when judgement and pleasure come together as a piece, within a soul which is (or should be) a well-structured whole, there will be no *separate* identifying of the nature of any pleasure; it cannot be fully characterised (as what it is) without taking into account the judgement involved in it.

The difficulty, then, will be determining whether pleasure and judgement do in fact form a unity of the relevant sort – a genuine whole, capable of revealing its parts and not just two conjoined but quite distinct entities. The hedonist – or the Humean – may want to deny

this very claim. And if Plato simply assumes that we all agree that complex mental phenomena are genuine unities, if he just assumes that not just mind and *psyche* generally, but everything which comprises them is to be understood in terms of wholes and not just agglomerated parts, then his point will never get off the ground. For this is precisely the premise that the Humean would,[80] and the hedonist would have to, deny.

Having already dwelt for some time on the nature of pleasure, Socrates invites Protarchus to look more closely into what a judgement is. 'Is it not memory and perception that lead to judgement or the attempt to come to a definite judgement?' (38b11-12), Socrates asks. What he does not say, but we should notice, is that these same two, memory and perception, came up in the discussion of pleasure; it was memory and perception that made desire and the pleasures of the mind possible – and no pleasures do not include mind. Moreover, a judgement does not become a judgement in virtue of its relation to pleasure, but in virtue of its relation to memory and perception – other cognitive capacities.[81]

Socrates sets out the nature of judgement by taking an instance of coming to a judgement, and slowing the process down, so that we can see the particulars of what the whole thing involves. According to the presentation here, the process of making a judgement brings one into dialogue with oneself.[82] Someone wanting to make up his mind about what he sees, 'might he then not again raise another question for himself. . . 'What could that be that appears to stand near that rock under a tree?'. . .And might he not afterwards, as an answer to his own question, say to himself, 'It is a man,' and in so speaking, would get it right?' (38c-d). This illustration shows us, rather than tells us, how memory and perception come together in judgement. Even in simple cases of immediately sensible situations, memory of what a man is, what a man looks like more or less, must be at

work, as well as the perception of that shadowy mass under the tree.[83] In company, a man might state the judgement he has come to, thus making it an assertion, 'whereas if he is alone, he entertains this thought by himself, and sometimes he may even resume his way for quite a long time with the thought in his mind' (38e5-7).

The notion that thought is primarily (or essentially) dialogical is not new to Plato.[84] The display here of a piece of thought happening, a judgement being made, serves to emphasise how complex a thing a mind must be, even in order to do the simplest of the things we do every day. Mind is not a monolith. It has doubts, and poses questions to itself. It tries an answer, and then can cast that answer into doubt again. A mind can carry a thought with it (38e5-7), while carrying on with other activities and further judgements. For a mind to be unified, it does not need to be uniform. On the contrary, it is reasoned discourse with itself, appropriate discussions or interactions within oneself that make it possible for a soul to be properly *one self*.

This imprinting of a judgement upon the soul comes in for special attention all its own.[85] Our soul, Socrates says is like a book, 'And if what is written is true, then we form a true judgement and a true account of the matter. But if what our scribe writes is false, then the result will be the opposite of truth' (39a3-5). This 'scribe' has slipped into the conversation unannounced. Originally it was the joint work of the 'memories, perceptions. . . [and] other impressions' (39a1) which did the inscribing of words on our souls. But once he has entered onto the scene to take responsibility for the verbal aspect of thinking, he rapidly acquires a companion.

> Do you also accept that there is another craftsman at work in our soul at the same time?. . .A painter who follows the scribe and provides illustrations to his words in

the soul. (39b2-6).[86]

The mere statement often underdescribes what actually goes on when we consider something, just as the mere words of a statement most often fail to capture much of the meaning that they manage to convey. At the same time that we come to a judgement, we see and consider things in a certain light, from a certain point of view, in a particular way. We intend one aspect rather than another to be prominent, we have in mind one version or vision of what we meant by our words rather than another. Identical statements can have, we might say, thinking of Plato's description of judgement as a silent assertion, a different tone.[87] Thus the process going on in our minds is rarely (or never?) captured just by the words alone. In order to bring out the complexity, and the fact that the business cannot be captured by any single, simple account or faculty, Plato personifies the different components of mental activity into illustrative humunculi. The apparently simple phenomenon of coming to a judgement is, it turns out, importantly complex.

The picture, though, of two little persons running about in our souls might seem to imply that there are two quite independent things going on here – say, thinking a proposition and then taking an attitude towards it.[88] But it is not our 'attitude' towards the proposition for which the painter is responsible, but rather the full specification of the meaning of the proposition.[89] The illustrating goes on whenever

a person takes his judgements and assertions directly from sight or any other sense-perception and then views the images he has formed inside himself, corresponding to those judgements and assertions. (39b8-c1)[90]

And Plato is quick to close down the possibility that these might be entirely separable events. 'Are not the pictures of the true judgements and assertions true, and the pictures of

the false ones false?' (39c4-5). That they are so related, in fact, follows from the very definition of the 'painter's' work. There is not a second decision taken (it is after all 'coming to a decision' that we are trying to explain, and it would hardly do to explain it by embedding another act of judgement within it); the imaging, or envisioning (40a7) simply follows along with the 'written' statements, illustrating the meaning of the propositions.

So not only the words impressed upon our souls can be true or false, so too can the accompanying non-verbal impressions (39c4-5). Sometimes something will not leave an impression with us of how it actually is, but of something else instead. And the impressions left right now, just as the words, may – like any judgement – be made about something which has been, something which is, or something which will be. Asked by Socrates 'whether these experiences are necessarily confined to the past and the present, [and] not also extended into the future,' Protarchus grants, 'They should apply equally to all the tenses: past, present and future' (39c10-12). He repeats his emphatic agreement to the same claim only ten lines later. I can consider right now whether last winter was a cold one, come to the conclusion that it was very cold indeed, and recollect the feeling of the frost, shivering, the brush of the icy wind over my face. I can do the same in the midst of this winter right now. But I can also, even especially, judge this autumn that the coming winter will be a particularly cold one, and envisage vividly how that will feel, the wet feet, frozen toes and fingers, crystalline branches of trees, uncertain and icy paths, smell of dry, crisp air, etc. With this we are already very close to equating the same images impressed upon us in judgements about the future with the images that feed desire, hope and anticipation, and their opposites. In desire, one part mental pleasure one part physical or mental pain, although we felt a lack, we were also – through memory and perception – in contact with

that thing which would fill the lack, and being able to entertain the thought of it (to recollect it), we could hope for and anticipate it.

'Hope', Socrates argues, is not something added on to some judgement or another about the future – hope just *is* some such assertion about the future. 'All of them [the writings and pictures that come to be in us] are really hopes for future times, and we are forever brimful of hopes, throughout our lifetime' (39e4-5). Hope is nothing above and beyond the assertions made about the future, nor is it some particular non-assertoric part of such judgements. Hope is identified neither with the 'scribe's' efforts, nor with those of the 'painter', but with the unified project that they together complete, which as a whole is a judgement.

One might, at this point, want to object to this account of psychic phenomena. 'Sure, Socrates does not have to add anything to 'judgement' *now*, in order to get 'hope' out – he has already built the non-cognitive element into the picture with this over-active painter. So let's just separate them out from one another, to get a more accurate view of the matter.' And in so objecting one would be both right and wrong. True enough, something 'extra' has been built into 'pure' judgement; but one would be mistaken to suppose that this is an objection to the point Plato is trying to make. The point was not to find something utterly simple, or something thoroughly (only) 'cognitive' and then try to get hopes, and later other pleasures, out of that. The point was to show that the mental is unified; that mental phenomena are complex and cannot have their component parts specified independently of the complex of which they are a part.

Thus we are offered, in the first account of false pleasures, a picture of the *psyche* as an integrated whole, whose parts or 'events' are themselves only to be understood as

integrated wholes. This means that the falsity to which pleasure is potentially subject is not a mere metaphorical falsity, one better ascribed to some other, ostensibly 'more cognitive' faculty. Socrates has worked to evoke a kind of possible mistake, or failure, internal to pleasure, and internal to having pleasure. Taking pleasure is, in part, a kind of assessment, and thus can go wrong in just the way any assessment might. It is moreover, the assessment that something is 'good for us', likely to fill some lack and restore one to one's best natural state.

This is why the hedonist is an opponent that Plato must take very seriously. It is true, in a way, that we do – as a matter of fact – desire pleasure and avoid pain. This is what makes hedonism so seductive. Because pleasure presents itself as the assessment of something as being good for us, we think hedonism *must* be right. Plato might be taken to have asked the further question: What is it about pleasure it might be desirable? Unlike most Humeans and Utilitarians, this is not, for Plato, just a self-evident truth of humanity which cannot shed light or be inquired into. The reason we find pleasure desirable is because pleasure is the sensation associated with finding something good. Or better: pleasure is the recognition of something as good.[91]

The picture of the *psyche* offered here, then, is one according to which human consciousness is cognitive all the way down. For if pleasures and pains can gain their truth and falsity in virtue of the accuracy of the perception of reality they express, then this will have wide-ranging consequences. As Socrates predicts, 'the same account holds in the case of fear, anger, and everything of that sort, namely that all of them can at times be false' (40e2-3). Protarchus agrees readily enough that this is 'certainly' the case. But it is in light of the analysis of emotions as various complexes of pleasure and pain that we understand

why this extension is justified. This is not, of course, to say that there is nothing except cognition, that everything is *only* cognitive, but rather to say that nothing is for us which is wholly without cognition, if it is an experience of a human being. If so, then[92] Plato also did not believe in totally unformed, shapeless 'sense-data' experience.[93] That this view of the pervasiveness of the 'cognitive' is Plato's will be all the more plausible when we consider how we have been set up to draw this very inference already in the 'cosmological argument'. Mind, there, was thoroughly embedded in the fabric of reality; and this reality was explicitly described as a larger scale of the truth about human beings.

This may seem a lot to be inferring from just a short passage arguing about false pleasures. Much of this will be reinforced in the 'appendix' to the first discussion of false pleasures, when Socrates illustrates the theory at work in actual human souls and lives. But there are other grounds, from the dramatic structure of the dialogue, to suppose that Plato meant his first description of false pleasures to carry such weight.

In the first place, Plato goes out of his way to insist that pleasures are *false*, and not wrong in some other way (40e8-9), or only false metaphorically. He also makes a point of allowing Protarchus to protest strenuously at the idea. This is not just a nod to conventional intuitions, but an opportunity for Plato to show that he is aware of the unreflective view of human psychology, and he is deliberately arguing against it, offering an alternative and hopefully better way of thinking about these things. Second, Plato spends by far the most space on this explicitly 'propositional' account of the falsity of pleasure. The third reason is the place of the discussion within the dialogue as a whole. From the beginning the discussion was supposed to be about hedonism as a view about the good life for human beings; and after only three pages, we know, and Protarchus knows, that we are going to

need a close analysis of pleasure before we can reach any conclusions. But this does not even begin for almost twenty pages. In the meantime, Socrates has been carefully building up around him just the tools he will need at his disposal in order to make the points about pleasure which are exposed by their possibility for being false. Finally, concerning the more immediate context, Socrates has already won from Protarchus the admission that there can, at least in some cases, be such a thing as false pleasure. Once he had described hope as a pleasure at 32c, Socrates might have easily deduced from the possibility of false hope that at least a special kind of pleasure could admit of truth and falsity. But he has instead taken a longer route, thereby giving grounds for a common thought (that hopes can be false) instead of simply assuming it is correct. With that he also sets up the possibility for pleasures in general to admit of falsity – for the facts which make it possible for pleasure to be 'propositionally' false will be the same, in part at least, which allow pleasure to be false in other ways.

VII. Persons and their Pleasures – The Good Man Argument

But Plato does not have Socrates move on to an examination of other pleasures straightaway. Instead, he dwells for a bit on some further implications of this interconnection between beliefs and the possibilities of pleasures. Without even attempting a graceful transition, Socrates simply demands of Protarchus, 'Well, then, in addition to what has been said now, also answer this question. . .Is not a man who is just, pious, and good in all respects, also loved by the gods?' (39e7-8, 10-11).

If the 'divine' could be read as deliberately equivocating here, then Plato has Socrates speak something that Protarchus would recognise as a pious truism – the gods love

good people – while at the same time reasserting a cornerstone of rationalist ethics. For if Socrates' notion of the divine is simply 'reason itself',[94] then his claim is essentially that the good man will be a favourite child of reason. His being loved by the gods consists in his having, by and large, true beliefs, if not quite knowledge. The evil man will not be loved by reason because being vicious consists precisely in having largely mistaken views about what is most important. From this it would follow from the arguments in the previous section that, as far as the pictures elaborating the content of the propositions go, 'in the case of good people these pictures are usually true, because they are dear to the gods, while quite the opposite usually holds in the case of wicked ones' (40b2-4). On Protarchus' view, this can only be due to divine dispensation – the Socratic view, however, has an explanation for why this would be so, how it is to be understood, and what the implications are.[95]

Socrates offers the example of the man who thinks of himself in possession of an enormous amount of gold and who 'also sees, in this inner picture of himself, that he is beside himself with delight' (40a-b). The good man, with good judgement, will enjoy such hopes as *true* hopes. 'In the case of good people, these pictures are usually true, because they are dear to the gods' (40b2-3). The wicked man, however, having distorted judgement, will still enjoy the pleasure of hoping, although it will be false (40b-c). The picture discussed involves someone envisaging 'himself in the possession of an enormous amount of gold and of a lot of pleasures as a consequence. And in addition, he also sees, in this inner picture [of?] himself, that he is beside himself with delight' (40a9-12). So the picture is of how delightful it would be to be wealthy and enjoy the rich man's pleasures. Because this is an elaboration on the theme of 'hope', which is a pleasure, we can take it that the good man and the wicked man are equally hoping – thus both are enjoying the images

conjured up at the thought of, say, winning the lottery. They are both enjoying now the prospect of some future condition or event.

Wherein exactly does the truth and falsity, respectively, lie? Although the good man will have largely true beliefs, it is unlikely that we are meant to suppose that he is omniscient, as well as good[96] – so it is unlikely to be the case that the good man only entertains such hopes when he actually *will* win the lottery. He will no doubt have a more realistic apprehension of the likelihood of the thing, and thus whether it is *realistically* to be hoped for.[97] But there is also the question of whether this or that is something to be hoped for at all, regardless of the actual likelihood of its coming about. And so there are correspondingly two ways in which what one hoped for may fail to come about – it may fail to come about at all, or it may indeed come about, but be very unlike what one had expected, or in fact bad for one. In the example Socrates gives, the good man and the bad man are supposed to be having, more or less, the 'same' hope. Both are hoping to win the lottery, but the good man has a much more realistic idea both of what that would *really* be like, and of what is to be hoped for in such an eventuality, which pleasures will turn out to be pleasant and good.[98]

Socrates rightly does not allow the hedonist the slippery escape route of claiming, in light of the full evidence, that what the wicked man experiences is 'not really pleasure at all'.[99] For the wicked man certainly *feels* pleased, even when his hopes are utterly false; and a wicked man who is also a hedonist would believe that such things were to be pursued for their pleasant quality, irrespective of their falsity.

> Whoever judges anything at all is always *really* judging, even if it is not about anything existing in the present, past, or future. . .[and likewise] whoever has any

> pleasure at all, however ill-founded it may be, really does have pleasure, even if sometimes it is not about anything that either is the case or ever was the case, or often (or perhaps most of the time) refers to anything that ever will be the case. (40c8-d10).

And this does not merely follow by analogy, but by the very definition of pleasure – at least of the kinds of pleasures under discussion.

But this example is more than an indirect elaboration on Socratic ethics – a portrait or case study of the good man and his true hopes. The moral drawn from the Good Man Argument has wide ramifications for moral psychology (and ultimately grave consequences for the hedonist). 'From what has now been said, it follows that there are false pleasures *in human souls* that are quite ridiculous imitations of true ones, and also such pains' (40c4-6). By bringing in a concrete example, Plato has refused to allow the discussion to rest at the level of disentangling and relating components of 'mental phenomena' in the abstract. (As if, say, these wispy things flit about untethered.) Pleasures and pains, as we recall from the opening of the discussion of pleasure, occur in living creatures and hope, pain and desire happen in souls, and significantly – at least for the purposes of our discussion – in *human* souls. But now Socrates has not just reminded us of this point, in case we had forgotten – collecting whatever handfuls of mental events one might catch in one's grasp, and tying them down in 'a human soul'. Persons have pleasures. Well! This is hardly surprising. But in the same movement, Socrates has neatly *correlated* pleasures to persons.[100] In keeping with the whole-part flow of nature and normativity, pleasures do not just 'happen' in persons; rather *which* pleasures happen is determined by *which* person it is happening in. That is what it is for a person to have a pleasure, for the experience to 'belong' to him, be

his. And generally, the kind of pleasures one has (or can have) will be determined by the kind of person one is, the overall state one's soul is in. True pleasures do not bundle together to make up a good man; good men, in virtue of their goodness, are capable of having true pleasures (make it possible for there to be true pleasures in them).

By bringing in the possibility of good men, Socrates has forced the hedonist's hand. Either the good man is the one who is able to accumulate a lot of pleasures – a radical notion saved up for ridicule[101] – or else the hedonist must accept some independent account of a person, and of what it is to be a good person.[102] For now, Protarchus accepts the conventional line. The man good in the conventional sense does indeed generally have hopes and memories that turn out to be true. Protarchus explains this by reference to divine benevolence. Socrates may, and should, have his own view – and if he meant his talk of the divine seriously in the earlier cosmological passage, then we can see how the arguments given might express as much his view as the conventional one. The good man does not just happen, by divine dispensation, to stumble only upon true pleasures, but rather his goodness consists (at least in part) in his having true beliefs – reason and mind alone can provide the standard according to which the goodness of a human *psyche* is measured, and reason and mind is alone responsible for bestowing 'gifts' accordingly – the 'reward' in this case being simply that one has true beliefs. The good man is not repaid for his goodness with true beliefs, or by having all of his wishes fulfilled. Having true beliefs, good and reasonable hopes is that wherein (both he, and) his goodness consist(s). Thus the link between the good man and his true pleasures is not incidental – they are so intimately interdependent that even chaos on Mt. Olympus could not undo their mutual implication.

VIII. Where Does This Leave Pleasure?

In the light of the developed thoughts on desire and human psychology that Plato offers here, we might wonder what, if anything, of the original definition of pleasure is supposed to remain with us. Pain and pleasure were said generally to arise from the disintegration and restoration of the natural state of a living being. More specifically, pain and pleasure would have to be the perception of the disintegration or restoration of one's own natural state. The model we were given for this was a standard model of pleasure as a refilling. But this image is decidedly limited. Hunger turns out to be a desire – a mixture of pleasure and pain – rather than simply a pain, while 'eating when hungry' will turn out to belong amongst a particular sort of mixed pleasures, which can only be had on the condition of pain, and for only exactly so long as the pain itself lasts.

If we consider hope or fear as a kind of pleasure or pain (or if, as Plato does not directly consider here, we supposed that we can also delight in memories – for the account, Plato stresses, should hold good for all three tenses, 'is', 'was', and 'will be'[39c1-1; 39d6-8]), then how well does the 'refilling' model of pleasure fare? It is difficult to imagine what we are being filled with, what hole in our nature is being filled in, during the time that we are experiencing hope or recollecting past joys. We are hoping *for* a refilling, perhaps - although if I hope to distinguish myself in battle, it is difficult to see which emptiness I am hoping will be filled. One might describe it as a hope that my natural state of being courageous will be 'restored', but this is already quite strained, and one is inclined to turn to Aristotle's talk of 'activity' and 'potentiality'.[103] The 'restoration' model of pleasure seems to stretch to the breaking point if we turn directly to hope itself – a pleasure deliberately brought into the discussion here by Socrates. For the maintenance of hope, which is

something that lasts over time, seems possible only on the condition that there is *no* restoration, of the kind hoped for, going on. For the month that I am waiting, hoping my play will win a prize at the Games, in what respect could I possibly describe *that* condition as a 'restoration to my natural state'?

Plato's approach to pleasure, and human psychology in the *Philebus* may be able to offer a response to this. If the divine life is not and should not be a human ideal, perhaps hoping for future improvement is after all part of our best natural state. 'We are forever brimful of hopes, throughout our lifetime,' Socrates and Protarchus agree (39e6). And it may not be an improvement, if we were to stop hoping, or to cease having things that we were hoping for. On the contrary, even if the particular things one hoped for were constantly changing, so that one stopped hoping for *this* or for *that*, to stop hoping *altogether* would be a serious blow to one's well-being.[104] Socrates is depicted even on his deathbed full of hopes.[105]

But the final description Plato offers of pleasure generally is of pleasure as a process of generation (53c-55c). He puts this theory into the mouths of others who remain nameless, so that it is not entirely certain that he endorses such a view, or thinks there are good arguments for it.

> Have we not been told that pleasure is always a *becoming* (*genesis*), and that there is no *being* at all of pleasure? There are some subtle thinkers who have tried to pass on this doctrine to us, and we ought to be grateful to them. (53c5-8)

Aristotle famously takes great exception to this definition of pleasure as a becoming (*genesis*), and spends much of his efforts in *Nicomachean Ethics VII* and *X* discrediting this view. His criticism is two-fold. The first line of attack insists on construing 'generation' as

a physical, temporal process, and – since it is a physical process towards an end – as a process which has differentiated parts, and is not the same and 'complete' at every moment. He offers in its place his own conception of pleasure as an 'activity' – an action 'complete at every moment', unlike a 'refilling' or a 'restoration' which must go through stages in order to be complete.

On Aristotle's understanding of *genesis* (one modelled primarily on physical change), if we allow 'pleasure as *genesis*' to be Plato's chosen theory, we will be only worse off trying to understand how hope itself should fit under this description. For *genesis* implies not just any old changing about, but an actual process of change, in some direction or another, for some end or another. As Plato himself insists, 'Every process of generation in turn always takes place for the sake of some particular being, and all generation taken together takes place for the sake of the existence of being as a whole' (54c3-5). But however my feelings may fluctuate in the course of the time that I wait for my hope to be realised or disappointed, they certainly do not move in any one, or coherent direction up to the point of the fulfilment of the hope. Even if my hoping is bound to come to an end at the moment of the next lottery draw, this fixed temporal end-point – unlike the 'end' of having a ship (54a-b) – does not serve to characterise or determine the shape or nature of the process. Shipbuilding, by contrast, is necessarily just as it is (more or less) in order that there be ships.[106]

But while the notion of pleasure put forward in the *Philebus* is the most likely target of Aristotle's remarks, it is not clear that Plato's views are accurately depicted, or vulnerable in the way that Aristotle supposes. For although Plato does indeed insist that pleasure is a *genesis*, a coming-into-being, his examples of the pleasures of eating and drinking serve

primarily as concrete examples of an ontological point. Aristotle's first objection clearly fails to meet Plato's point – for the kind of 'process' Aristotle describes has nothing to do with the relation Plato picks out, of which the lover and his beloved are the paradigm example. But Aristotle does use this to lead into the subtler notion of *genesis* as essentially end-directed and, consequently, end-dependent. And he supposes his distinction between movement and 'activity' to also undermine this aspect of Plato's conception of pleasure. And indeed it will do so, if the account in the *Philebus* does not have the resources to address the awkardness of pleasant hoping that Plato draws out so acutely.

What Plato needs, then, is some account of what *genesis* is which will unify his account of pleasure. This understanding of *genesis* should adequately and interestingly characterise 'hope' as much as 'eating when hungry', and we might then take this to be the aspect of pleasure to which we should attend. Plato, I suggest, does offer such an alternative to the concrete and physical reading of *genesis*, and it is one which succeeds in avoiding the Aristotelian criticism, because it defies just the distinction Aristotle wants to draw between process and activity. If we take it that the *Philebus* is not in the business of offering explanations of physical change, then we already have reason to wonder whether *genesis* is meant primarily as a description of (or reference to) physical generation, say plant growth or snowstorms. It may be rather that 'refilling with food' and 'refilling with drink' are particularly vivid illustrations of a conceptual-metaphysical point about ontological dependency and priority.

When Socrates introduces the claim of certain 'subtle thinkers', Protarchus is baffled. And Socrates finally, and elaborately, explains the significance of *genesis*, so far as it concerns the discussion the partners have been engaged in. After his initial, very abstract,

introduction of the terms, being and becoming, Socrates 'helpfully' explains to Protarchus what they mean, using playful and slightly obscure metaphors, much to the exasperation of his interlocutor. First Socrates aims his sights at yet higher abstractions – 'Suppose there are two kinds of things, one kind sufficient to itself, the other in need of something else' (53d3-4). This helps Protarchus not at all. But if we recall the hope from the initial definition of pleasure, that we might find some notion of 'coming to be' that was generic enough to cover both hopes and eating, and yet exact enough to be informative, then just some such notion of 'generation' is exactly what we have been looking for. Of the many aspects in the distinction between 'being' and 'becoming', the one that is important to Socrates in his argument, the one he wants to highlight as the paradigmatic difference between the two, is the asymmetry of dependence. Something which 'is' is self-sufficient, while anything which is in need of something else is dependent – 'coming-to-be' that which it is only provisionally, depending for its nature and identity upon circumstances or causes outside itself. Ostensibly in order to help Protarchus, Socrates follows up his elaboration on being and becoming by pointing to the relation between a lover and his beloved – 'now,' he asks Protarchus, 'try to think of another set of two items that corresponds to this pair in all the relevant features that we just mentioned' (53d12-e1). At this point Protarchus loses his cool: 'Do I have to repeat my request for the third time? Please express more clearly what it is you want to say, Socrates!' (53e2-3).

After the painstaking examination of pleasure, all of this high drama jumps out at the reader abruptly. Perhaps Protarchus is just tired of listening and thinking; perhaps he is cross with how smug Socrates is, now that he has clearly won the argument for mind over pleasure. Besides introducing a welcome bit of comic relief, however, Plato has drawn

much attention to the way in which the perfectly ordinary (one would think) distinction between 'being' and 'becoming' is going to be cashed out; and in case we have missed it, he has created an enormous air of expectancy around what is about to come. And what is about to come is a more careful elaboration of the same point. 'All things,' Socrates explains, 'are either for the sake of something else or they are that for whose sake the other kind comes to be in each case' (53e5-7). With the insultingly trivial example of shipbuilding, it is easily agreed that 'generation' falls into the former class, 'being' into the latter. But Socrates does not stop on the lowly level of ship-building. He does not just generalise the claim into one about the nature of anything that could be said to come-to-be, or to be – he further asserts that 'all generation taken together takes place for the sake of the existence of being as a whole' (54c4-5).

If we had any doubts about how the mixing of limit (*peras*) and unlimitedness (*apeiron*) was supposed to result in 'certain generations' (25e4), when the mixed things produced are not 'this hot day' but 'climate' (26b1-2), and 'music' (26a2-5), then this should finally lay these doubts to rest. Generation, understood as physical generation, is not itself terribly important or interesting. What *is* important and interesting about it, though, is that it is a particularly concrete case of a general phenomenon of ontological, and epistemological, dependency.[107] And because coming-to-be things are dependent on something else for their very identity, they cannot in and of themselves be 'good' or 'bad' or anything else.[108] Whenever they come-to-be, or come-to-be (in some way) it will be in virtue of something else that they do so.

There is even a way of rendering the point in natural English, without abandoning the *genesis* form of speaking: no sound, one might argue, comes to be musical until and

unless it is understood in the context of and by reference to music as a whole, and some or another scale in particular – unless, that is, it takes place in a musical context. Similarly, no pleasure – even hope – ever comes to be fully determinate (as the pleasure it is) unless and until it arises as and is understood as the hope of a particular human being – in a soul, that is, of a peculiarly structured kind, fitted for and engaged in a particular sort of life. In this sense, hope, no less than eating, suffers inherently a dependency on its context for its very definition and identity which knowledge, say, does not. (Pleasure, we recall, was *apeiron* – indeterminate.)

According to Plato, the problem with pleasure being a *genesis* is that this makes pleasure utterly dependent upon it context – both upon its object and upon the soul in which it arises – for its very identity. This is the significance of the claim that 'all becoming is for the sake of being'. The hopes of the wise man are not the same as the hopes of the fool, even when the propositions they would utter to express those hopes are the same. The view of pleasure as within the compass of the cognitive and the view of pleasure as dependent upon the entire context of the mental, of the *psyche*, for its identity and existence, go hand in hand.

IX. Method and Moral Psychology

In the end, then, Plato's picture of the mind contrasts strongly with theories popular since Hume (at least).[109] Plato does not start with basic building blocks of the human psyche, exhausted by two quite distinct sorts of mental phenomena – beliefs on the one hand and desires on the other – which are related to one another in each instance, if at all, only contingently. On the agglomerative approach to moral psychology Plato is working against,

the story of desires ends (desire as impulse towards whatever I happen to want) where Protarchus' notion of pleasure (that sensation which is the object of desire) begins. Of course, on such an account, desires differ from one another in a trivial way – they might have different objects. But, *insofar as they are desires*, the particular object they might have is inconsequential; it has no bearing on the nature of the desire itself, which maintains its self-same nature, regardless of context. This 'self-same' nature, however, must therefore be described in such a thin way, that the contrast between a desire and a belief is simply that between an impulse and some mental state that is not an impulse. Amongst themselves, desires are distinguished only by magnitude.[110]

The problem with a 'Humean' psychology is not, then, just its simplicity. Positing two or three more building blocks would hardly improve the situation. For Plato's point – though it is difficult to see in our contemporary passion for analytic method and piecemeal constructing – is that analysis is conceptually an inappropriate way to go about understanding minds, or lives, or any other whole. This is not *just* because once we have a heap of parts we have lost exactly the bit that made them not just a heap of parts, and so interesting to investigate in the first place. It is also because, considered carefully, we cannot even arrive at a heap of *parts*, once we try to understand things independently of the context in which they belong and make sense. How they fit in and fit together constitutes their identity in such a way that considering them separately, even just conceptually, fundamentally distorts or destroys the object under consideration.

Besides flattening out our picture of the mental generally, the Humean analytic approach leaves more to be explained that it explains. 'Desire' becomes a place-holder for whatever existed if there was action, or failed to exist if there was no action. The various

vicissitudes of desire, both predictable and unpredictable, are entirely unaccounted for. The complex inter-relations which desires might have to one another, to our beliefs, memories and perceptions, and the various attitudes we can take to our desires can, on the Humean approach, only be characterised as further desires of different sizes. But this is hardly an explanation. We *do* sometimes have desires of different intensities – and that is something different from being disgusted at oneself for some ignoble deed, or finding something good or beautiful irrespective of one's ends or interests. For the analytic or agglomerative approach to method and moral psychology, the fact that these beliefs and these desires happen to arise alongside one another seems to have consequences for neither, and thus the whole tricky business of evaluation, of sharing values and discussing them becomes a riddle.[111]

Insofar as Plato does have building blocks, or fundamental elements, of his psychology in the *Philebus*, there would be among them pleasure and pain (whether they should be considered as two or as one), the pleasant-painful desires, as well as judgement, knowledge, mind. This bears a resemblance to the more familiar distinction, but we should be careful not to force it into the same pattern. Pleasures and pains are not, in and of themselves, truth oriented, while judgement presumably is; but the separation between the two orientations is not by any means clear or fixed.[112] It is not just pleasure and pain that can shade into one another in indeterminate ways. Because pleasures for human beings come about in a context including capacities for thought and judgement, for recollection and anticipation, the nature of the pleasures themselves are altered, and various kinds may be more or less intimately involved with various kinds of thoughts and judgements. In taking on some object rather than another – or in relating to an object, belief, value in one way

rather than another – a pleasure becomes of a certain sort rather than another, subject then to certain possibilities but not others. Plato brings this out in his discussion of the various ways in which pleasures can be 'false'. Thus while it may be in terms of pleasures and pains that the wide range of affective life is to be understood, this is only possible because the pleasures and pains are radically indeterminate. They are not only unfixed with respect to their 'quantity', admitting – insofar as they are pleasures – of 'the more and the less' (Philebus' reason for counting pleasure the good was indeed a bad one). Pleasure and pain themselves also only acquire their various definite characters depending not just upon their object, but also upon a combination of its context and relations – in conjunction with other pleasures and pains, memories, assessments, beliefs about the future. In truth, it is the whole 'building blocks' approach to psychology that is mistaken. And this is at once a fact about our own psychology (the kind of thing it is) and about what it is (categorically) to understand, to grasp a whole as a whole.

X. Pleasure and Ethics

One of the contentious issues *within* the field of ethics involves the attempt to clarify just what the subject matter is. Any view about which questions moral philosophy is meant to address seem already to imply, or arise from, some particular ethical outlook or another. Is ethics supposed to be about what we do? Or who we are? Or what is good – either generally, or for 'us'? On any of these approaches, it is not immediately obvious why we should find ourselves forced to deal with the topic of pleasure at all. And yet whatever the ethical doctrine being advocated, pleasure eventually forces itself into the discussion. We might well think that any adequate account of ethics should be able to explain this

peculiarity – yet this, too, would be to presume a certain conception of what moral philosophy is about.

The Kantian tradition tries to deal with pleasure by exclusion. The deontologist is not mysteriously silent on the topic – rather, she must work actively to exclude pleasure, inclination, pain, and the rest of rich human emotional life from the very definition of what it is to think ethically. The more she has to work to force the exclusion, the more obvious it becomes that something more significant – and *ethically* significant – than my idiosyncratic preferences is being shunted aside. Not only do pleasures and pain, pride and joy and anger and humility and grief, *inform* us about value; they are at least partially constitutive of it.

But if we have locked ourselves into supposing that *either* reason *or* 'the passions' must be the source and guide to the good, we can see why the Kantian takes such trouble about personal pleasures. For the alternative is to leave the field to the Humean, for whom reason is simply one of many useful tools for getting what we want. Desires, pleasures and pains play the role of psychological 'raw material', which is simply given as it is, and must be worked with, and direct the work of moulding a human life. Our Humean thus easily slides into the utilitarian-hedonist position. There can be no final arbiter of value besides pleasure, and pleasure *qua* pleasure is utterly generic, differing only in size and not (relevantly) in kind;[113] anything else valuable in a human life will be so on account of the amount of pleasures it is able to provide.

Plato's conception of pleasure, and his observations about how judgement and intelligibility work, offer the possibility of a different way of thinking about ethics. In the first place, ethics is not centrally about 'what to do' – what I do, and the very understanding of what my action is, can only be understood as the action of a particular person within a

particular life. Actions do, surely, matter – *as* the actions of persons. In the second place, then, 'good' is not something that can always be made 'better' by having more of it, as the maximising consequentialist supposes. 'Good' is normative in that it sets standards of appropriateness and fittingness – value attaches primarily to wholes, and only through them to parts. If we put persons, and not just their actions (as if these were detachable!), at the centre of our ethical inquiries, and understand persons as wholes, then we can better find a way of understanding the place of pleasure in a human life that allows it to contribute to making a good life valuable, without allowing it to become the final measure in terms of which anything of value must be either reconceived or cast aside.

Recapitulation:

Finding a rightful place for pleasure within a well-lived life will not depend on eliminating from it all supposedly subversive tactile qualities, or 'affectivity'.[114] But it will mean making pleasure amenable to reasoning, and even to being reasoned with,[115] so far as it is something that it makes sense to think of 'educating'. And this can be done by attending to the consequences of the fact that pleasure for us always arises within a context of intelligibility, and it is informed and enformed by this constant and continuous activity of discrimination, judgement, belief, memory and anticipation within us. This has not 'rationalised' the passions, so much as brought them within the compass of the integrated whole that a person is. But this has rationalised them to the extent that it is the pervasiveness of the cognitive capacities within even pleasure and pain that has made the integration possible. By applying the principles of whole-to-part flow of identity and normativity to persons, we have articulated just the sort of moral psychology a defence of

rationalist ethics requires – and requires especially if it is to resist falling into a position of extreme rationalism that is incapable of recognising any other goods. A friend of emotivism, or 'sentimentalism' in ethics, a hedonist, might well want to reject this picture of human *psyche* for precisely this reason. The following chapter will look at the price of that rejection. What we will find, I hope to show, is that although the rejection is not impossible, it cannot be piecemeal or partial, and the consequences therefore will not be insignificant.

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[1] Cf. *Repbulic VIII* (560c-561d) The democratic man, for example, is one who has lost sight of every value but pleasure (*Rep.* 559d –561d).

[2] Cf. *Gorgias* 505b *ff.*

[3] Cf. Protagoras 351c ff.

[4] This is approximately the view of Plato's project in ethics that Irwin [1995] articulates.

[5] Cf. *Republic* 505a-e; *Euthydemus* 281e.

[6] For art and pleasure, cf. e.g. *Republic* II and X; for politics and pleasure, cf. e.g. *Laws* II, III, IV; on rhetoric and pleasure, see the *Gorgias*; physics (or physiology) of pleasure comes up in the *Timaeus*; both the *Republic* and the *Laws* are preoccupied with proper education, and consider the proper relationship to pleasure and pain integral to this.

[7] Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* X, 5 (1176a), where Aristotle acknowledges that pleasures 'vary to no small extent, in the case of men at least; the same things delight some people and pain others, and are painful and odious to some, and pleasant to and liked by others. . . But in all such matters, that which appears to the good man is thought to be really so. If this is correct, as it seems to be, and virtue and the good man as such are the measure of each thing, those also will be pleasures which appear so to him, and those things pleasant which he enjoys.' Aristotle, admittedly, has much more than this to say in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. A crucial question, however, is whether he can give an account of what it is to be 'a good man' that is not just a list of virtues? And if not, will a list of virtues do?

[8] Cf. Irwin [1996]

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[9] Cf. e.g. Kant [1787] 393, 413; Kant [1797] 6:215-216; Kant [1790] 'Analytic of the Beautiful', First Moment, §4.

[10] See, for example, objections articulated in Williams [1981], 'Persons, Character and Morality'.

[11] Taking aversion to be the desire to avoid.

[12] *Protagoras* 356e *ff.*

[13] Animals go for pleasure, and we are animals. But we are also *something else*. And it is by virtue of this *something else* that morality has any pull on us (*mere* animals, after all, cannot be moral or otherwise). But this *something else* has nothing to do with pleasure; and so morality must also have nothing to do with pleasure. The mistake, in Plato's view, will rest on the building-blocks approach to the *psyche*.

[14] Discussed in Chapter 5.

[15] Discussed in Chapter 7.

[16] That this is significant to the hedonist thesis is foreshadowed in the *Protagoras*, where the sophist, asked to endorse hedonism, replies 'It seems to me to be safer to respond not merely with my present answer in mind but from the point of view of my life overall' (351d2-4). This issue will be taken up in Chapter 5.

[17] This sort of continuity, or consistency, is what Callicles so vividly lacked. Cf. Woolf [2000].

[18] Kolb [1983] discusses a similar point, in what he sees in the *Philebus* as Plato's continued opposition to atomism.

[19] 'Unlike beasts,' writes Peter Winch making a similar point, 'men do not merely live but also have a conception of life. This is not something that is simply added to their life; rather, it changes the very sense which the word 'life' has, when applied to men. It is no longer equivalent to 'animate existence'.' (Winch [1972], 'Understanding a Primitive Society')

[20] Cf. Chapter 2.

[21] Cf. Chapter 3.

[22] We might think about the method by which living beings come about in the *Timaeus*. The Divine Craftsman does not wander about, stumble upon an ear ('Oh, maybe I could use this for something') and maybe a leg or two, and then see what he can make of them. He considers what it is to be a living being (30c), and in the light of that understands that it must be sensible (31b); and if sensible, then perhaps, able to perceive

sounds; and if able to hear, then possessing an organ and faculty of hearing. Whatever constraints necessity might put upon the actual outcome, this organ – however it may turn out to need to be – will be an ear. (See, e.g. the description of how the lesser gods designed the human body at 44d *ff.*)

[23] Cf. Aristotle's account of soul in *de Anima*, which, if it does not require the accumulation theory of mind, yet is presented in such a way that it is easily adapted to such an approach to understanding souls. (*de Anima* I, 5; II, 2-12)

[24] This point is relevant to the conclusion of the dialogue. When mixing the good life, what it will be good for the life to have in it is a matter determined in part by what else belongs in it. This is dramatised quite literally by Plato, when he has Socrates speak in the voice of the pleasures themselves, and mind and knowledges themselves. Of course what is said, and the weight given to the different voices is also relevant to understanding how the mixture is to be a good one. But what belongs to a human life will be determined in light of what else is there, and what else is possible for human beings. (Cf. Chapter 7) Because a human being is a whole, what it means for it to have certain parts will be transformed in virtue of the fact that they are parts of *this* whole.

[25] Only when the 'high and low' is related to music, rather than weather, does it become pitch, and not temperature.

[26] This will escape collapsing into relativism ('pleasant for you' and 'pleasant for me') through the normative work being done by the notion of a complex whole – man is one complex unity (by reference to which various sorts of human beings will be understood and measured), pleasure is, perhaps, another. And these two will be related in structured, mutually informative, ways.

[27] The first attempt was in the opening skirmish, where conversation was broken off once the concession is squeezed from Protarchus, with considerable difficulty, that pleasure – although always pleasant – nonetheless comes in various kinds (14a). The nature of that variety, and the implications that might have for the hedonist thesis were not explored. Instead, Socrates takes up the principle of the concession – that some unity could comprise complexity – and only after spelling out the implications of this principle at some length does he return to the point of departure. This time, he presses the hedonist – if, as conceded, pleasure is variegated, then what are the kinds, how do they differ, and how are they related to one another? Protarchus begs off, and

Plato leaves us hanging for a second time (19a-20b).

[28] This classification was discussed in Chapter 3.

[29] Is Philebus actually committed to the principle that 'more is better'? If so, then it will be a mistake to identify the mindless hedonism dismissed as a mollusc-life with Phileban hedonism. For if, believing pleasure is the good, Philebus also believes that more of it is always better, then he will have moved into the calculative camp of sophisticated hedonism. This 'quantitative' notion of the good, as we shall see in detail in Chapter 5, fits in with the view generally that Plato is opposing, that 'good' is what we've got when we have counted up all the 'goods'.

[30] Although he may not, as a policy, think it most pleasant to worry about what would be most pleasant in each case. (In this way he may not actually *be* a maximiser; still, there could never be some lesser pleasure that was better than some greater pleasure – and presumably nothing that would count as, 'as pleasant as possible', without being Epicurean about pleasure.)

[31] He also does not share the hedonist's view of the *kind* of thing goodness is. Cf. N. Cooper [1968]. This will be addressed in Chapter 5.

[32] When pleasure and pain are simply left so, with no standard of measurement except in comparison to each other, the measure of them becomes distorted. This is the second type of 'falsity' pleasures admit of, and will be discussed in Chapter 5. In the examination of false pleasures, we will be given further reason for supposing pleasure belongs to the class of the unlimited; it will gradually become clear that there are many ways in which pleasure lacks any internal measure, character or structure, taken simply as pleasure (or 'insofar as it is pleasant'). For now, though, we might wonder whether pleasure and pain are related to one another in the same way that the more familiar 'unlimitednesses' are. Are pleasure and pain mutually defining the way hotter and colder are? Does 'pleasant' just mean 'more pleasant than (something) more painful'? And is this not the relation that Socrates would have to be claiming for them, in calling pleasure 'unlimited' and then asserting that pleasure and pain must be treated together? We do well to bear this question in mind, for we must recall that the dialogue has done a lot of work to focus our attention on quite a different way in which dissimilar things could be related to one another. Our paradigm unities, the *monads*, were thought also to have dissimilar parts, which together shed light on each other and on the nature of the whole which they comprised. The

difference would be that in the latter case, the dissimilarities contributed to the structure of some comprehensible unity. In the case of 'hotter and colder' there is no unity there, no structure to be comprehended.

[33] Cf. *de Anima* II, 4, where this idea is modified to fit Aristotle's general framework of form and matter. 'In the case of all complex wholes formed in the course of nature there is a limit or ratio which determines their size and increase, and limit and ratio are marks of soul but not of fire, and belong to the side of formulable essence rather than that of matter' (416a15-18). When Plato talks of a thing having a nature, he is not concerned necessarily with biological organisms, but with the identity of a unity – what it is to be that thing (man, good, beauty, ox, music).

[34] And there may not be any *other* kind of 'thing' at all.

[35] We might see this by reflecting on how music, as a system of complex ratios (17c11-e6, 26a2-4) is related to musical performance (55e5-56a7). Barnes [1988] illustrates the normativity implied in any judgement of what something is. He uses the example of the complications in talking about Herms with their noses broken off – it is only by implicit reference to what it would be for the statue to be whole that we are able to understand what it, in fact, is, namely, an incomplete statue.

[36] A link that will become more explicit in the discussion of desire.

[37] See D. Frede [1985] and [1992] for an opposing view. It is generally assumed that if this blanket characterisation of pleasure as restoration does not cover all pleasures, then nothing does. Gosling and Taylor [1982] take the latter view.

[38] The pure pleasures of 50e-55c will be discussed in Chapter 6.

[39] While this may be so in all cases of pleasure, it is not implausible that plant or mollusc or bat awareness will be qualitatively different from that of humans.

[40] Cf. also *Repbulic* IX, 585b

[41] This simple statement does seem to equate the refilling and the pleasure. But while there must be a lack in order for a pain to arise (a true one, at any rate), not all lacks are perceived, as will be seen shortly, in the discussion of memory (33d-34a), and as will be reiterated in response to 'Heraclitean' objections (43a-c). In order for a 'lack' to be painful, or a restoration pleasant, it must be 'felt' or perceived.

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[42] D. Frede [1993] considers desires to be included amongst pains (pg. 35, n. 2). I think, by contrast, that it is an 'in between' condition (35e7-36b9), a painful awareness of lack combined with the pleasant anticipation of restoration (36b7-9). I shall say more about this below.

[43] To which Aristotle so heartily objected in *Nicomachean Ethics* VII and X. I will discuss this further in section X of this chapter.

[44] Hackforth [1945] points out that Plato credits to thesis to certain clever men, and this should make us consider whether and in what way Plato does or does not endorse the view himself. But Hackforth thinks that Plato cannot endorse it without contradiction. But the contradiction only arises if *genesis* refers to 'sensible particulars', as Hackforth thinks it must. The discussion of pleasure, I shall argue, actually provides us with a quite different, if related, account of the significance of *genesis*.

[45] We might also consider the *Philebus'* account of pleasure to give some account of how the various kinds of pleasure identified in *Republic* IX might relate to one another, and not just be three very separate kinds of psychic event.

[46] We can see in the way sets up the hedonist thesis in the opening of the *Philebus* ('Philebus holds that what is good for all creatures. . .'[11b4-5]) and in the final triumphant rebuttal of the hedonist with which the dialogue closes, that Plato is fully aware that there is such a view taken to ground hedonism, and that he has such an opponent in view. Pleasure is not the highest good, not 'even if all the cattle and horses and the rest of the rest of the animals gave testimony by following pleasure' (67b1-2).

[47] I shall look more closely in Chapter 5 at how this shift happens dialectically, in conversation with the hedonist.

[48] Most notably Gosling and Taylor [1982].

[49] I think this mistaken, and for several reasons. First of all, to deny any coherence to pleasure amounts to rejecting the possibility that they might be true or false, except metaphorically. Truth acts as a normative criterion for what something *should* be (Chapter 6); and the refutation of enlightened hedonism will depend, in part, on recognising that real pleasures can nonetheless be false, and not just metaphorically so. It makes sense to speak of how pleasure should or should not be; but this 'should' makes sense only by reference to what pleasure would be, if it were truly itself. But for that, there must be something that it is to be pleasure. (See

esp. sections VIII and IX of this chapter, and Chapter 5). Second, while it is true that Plato emphasises the complexity and variety of pleasure, it is Socrates' own candidate for the Good, rather than pleasure, which is in danger of suffering from radical disunity. The original list Socrates gives of the Good as 'knowing, understanding, and remembering, and what belongs with them, right judgement and true calculations' (11b6-c1) does not hang together in any obvious way, and the bits likely to be most similar or tightly related are given separate treatment in the dialogue – knowledge is under discussion in the Divine Method, while mind is treated in the 'cosmology'. If disunity were the primary objection to positing pleasure as the aim in life, we should expect a considerable amount of work (or at least some indications) on behalf of the Socratic candidate, to the effect that his own favourite – quite in contrast to Philebus' – is a *real* unity. In fact, we find nothing of the kind (even if the coherence of the parts of Socrates' candidate can be reconstructed from the descriptions given). Socrates objects to pleasure's being *apeiron*, perhaps, but not just to its being several. Moreover, if Plato wished to present pleasure as radically fragmented – to the point of incoherence – it is troubling that he should give Socrates to speak and argue as if pleasures could be taken, in some points at least, as a whole. Without *necessarily* endorsing it, Socrates concludes his discussion of pleasure with the comment that 'we ought to be grateful' to the 'subtle thinkers who have tried to pass on this doctrine to us', to wit, that 'pleasure is always a process of *becoming*, and that there is no *being* at all of pleasure' (53c5-8). And this will be crucial to the concluding arguments against hedonism.

[50] Cf. Lovibond [1990] 225

[51] Cf. Price [1995], esp. pp. 33-40.

[52] Socrates takes pains to remark that the affection of the body did not merely escape our notice – as if we could have been aware of it, but were looking in the wrong direction at just that moment – nor was it dismissed from consciousness. 'But you must not so misunderstand me as to suppose I meant that this 'obliviousness' gave rise to any kind of forgetting' (33e2-3). It never had the possibility of becoming an object of consciousness in the first place (33e5), and so there was simply no perception happening (34a1). These worries about perception and its relation to the soul, and those about memory that follow, are familiar from the *Theaetetus*, where they seemed much more worrying (esp. *Tht.* 184-186). Does Plato perhaps take it as already settled that there must be some unifier of experience (call it the soul) in order for there to be unified experience

– that is, recognisable *experience* – at all?

[53] See Chapter 3.

[54] So, for example, D. Frede [1993].

[55] This is an instance of how a metaphysical error amounts to a moral one.

[56] Cf. *Politicus* 276c4-d5, where the Eleatic Stranger remarks that 'we again made a large mistake' (276c5) in the story just told in their quest for the statesman. They should have 'divided off the divine herdsman, on one side, and the human carer on the other' (276d4-5). Human affairs are not simple copies of their divine counterparts; even knowing how a divine ruler would behave cannot reveal the true nature of ideal *human* governance. (Cf. Rosen [1995]).

[57] Chapter 5 will address the discussion of the stern men of science, haters of pleasures, promulgating the false doctrine of the nature of pleasure (42c-44d).

[58]This implies that desire is, strictly speaking, always for pleasure, rather than for the object of pleasure. But pleasure is not some generic stuff, which is inevitably desirable. As we shall see in section VIII, pleasure takes on shape, becomes a determinate sensation, according to its object and according to its place within a *psyche* of complex experiences. Desire for any pleasure will be likewise characterised by the particular nature of the pleasure.

[59] Some (e.g. Sayre [1983]) use it as evidence of an allusion to the Doctrine of Recollection. Because we cannot have a first pain or pleasure, we must be born with the ability to recollect what the objects of pleasure would be. The problem with this view is that on the *Philebus* theory of pleasure and pain, at any rate, any state described in other dialogues as the pre-existence of the soul *could* not put us in touch with anything as an object of pleasure. Plato says specifically at 34b that the recollection we are interested in is of experiences the soul has had *with* the body.

[60] Hackforth [1945] sees the problem and criticises Zeller for opting to take the restored state as the object of recollection, opting instead for the process of restoration as the object of desire. It is not at all clear to me that these two can be easily separated, or that Plato thought they could be.

[61] Cf. Williams [1959]

[62] Contra Frede [1993] 35, n. 2.

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[63] This is a familiar charge against the mindless pleasures of the profligate. (Cf. *Gorgias* 493d *ff.*) And in due course, Socrates will appeal to this point in the face of the 'enlightened' hedonist's tendency to fall back into simple hedonism. (See Chapter 5.)

[64] We might think it odd for Plato to be implying that it would be just to laugh at *anyone's* misfortune. Is this simply a nod to conventional morality, so that we do not get side-tracked and can keep our attention on the point currently at issue?

[65] This exposition takes Socrates almost two pages to spell out in full (48b5-50a8). If there is anything in the *Philebus* that is reminiscent of the divisions of the *Politicus* and the *Sophist*, it is this treatment of mixed pleasures, and in particular of the mixed mental pleasures (47d8-50d6). The contrast in style with what precedes and follows is marked, and we might well wonder why Plato has had Socrates suddenly fall into this rapid analytic manner, just when talk has come to the emotions. Is it perhaps, a piece of malicious self-parody?

[66] In case we wonder whether the relation between love and truth might have been abandoned since the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, it is reiterated in the *Philebus*. Dialectic, the finest of the sciences, will turn out to be 'by its nature a capacity in our soul to love the truth and to do everything for its sake' (58d3-4).

[67] These would be among what are later included in the well-mixed human life as the mixed pleasures that 'commit themselves to virtue as to their deity and follow it around everywhere' (64e4-5).

[68] Cf. Kolb [1983].

[69] Cf. Lovibond [1990].

[70] The methodology of 15b-20c and the metaphysics of 23c-27c, treated in Chapter 2.

[71] Desire being a kind of pleasure-pain, memory a relative of judgement (cf. Socrates' original list of candidates at 11b).

[72] This notion will be foreign – indeed, perhaps inconceivable – if one begins with a conception of the mental which has a radical and irreconcilable split between belief and desire at its heart. This may account for much of the difficulty in coming to terms with Plato's tripartite division of the soul in the *Republic*. Once belief and desire are defined in opposition to one another, it will be difficult then to see what kind of working relationship the desiderative and intellective parts of the soul are supposed to have with one another. Cf. e.g., Williams

[1973]1. If, however, we refuse to take this 'original division' as necessary, then we can appreciate better the implications of the innocuous-sounding definition of the pleasure of hope as the anticipation of a return to one's natural state (where one's natural state is considered the best state one could be in). For a nice exposition of the parts of the soul may well be related, and be well related, see Irwin [1995].

[73] The standard formulation of the distinction in contemporary moral philosophy contrasts world-to-mind fit and mind-to-world fit, as for example Williams [1973]2, 'Ethical Consistency'

[74] 'Wrongly pleased' is not yet a moral characterisation of the pleasure, nor is it illicitly importing the notion of a false pleasure. Being wrongly pleased apparently describes the kind of phenomenon that Protarchus has already agreed exists – when, namely, someone 'who, either in a dream or awake, either in madness or any other delusion, sometimes believes he is enjoying himself, while in reality he is not doing so' (36e5-7).

[75] Of course Protarchus should insist, and common usage would support him, that pleasures could no more be true than they could be false. But Socrates has merely overstated the point for dramatic effect. The explanation required of Protarchus is essentially the same. It might amount, in brief, to the claim that pleasures are not propositions, and only propositions could be true or false. And it is just this ground that Socrates sets out to challenge.

[76] Cf. Dybikowski [1970]

[77] Cf. Gosling [1959]; Dybikowski [1970]

[78] Cf. Chapter 1, section VII.

[79] Should Protarchus have rejected the difference? Could he have? Insisting here that '*qua* pleasure' they were not different would have landed him back in the swamp of undifferentiated hedonism. If *all* the hedonist can say about the situation is that '*qua* pleasures' all pleasures are the same, then he is allowing no room at all for sophisticated, calculative hedonism. For Protarchus, this is no longer an option. (See Chapter 5.)

[80] Cf. Blackburn [1998].

[81] We have already had the discussion of perception and memory in the original description of pleasure, where it was pointed out that even perception was not merely an affair of the body, but also necessarily the business of the soul. This does not yet make it 'cognitive' in our sense of it perhaps, and perhaps it would not make it into the family of Socrates' preferred good. Nevertheless it is sharply distinguished from the standard notion

from contemporary moral psychology of 'desire' – the non-cognitive generally – as that which fits the world to the mind, rather than the mind to the world. (Cf. e.g. Williams [1973])

[82] The interpretation of this passage is hotly contested. Why does Plato introduce dialogue at all? What is the point of personifying cognitive processes? A common accusation here is that Plato merely introduces the notion of a 'painter' in the soul as a bit of Platonic trickery, to make his own counter-intuitive claims appear more intuitively plausible. (Cf. e.g. Gosling [1959] and [1960]; Kenny [1960]; Dybikowski [1970]; D. Frede [1985]) I hope that the account I offer will make this sceptical interpretation unnecessary.

[83] Theaetetus 191b *ff.*

[84] e.g. *Sophist* 263 *ff.*; *Theaetetus* 186 *ff.*, on which, see D. Frede [1989], Burnyeat [1990].

[85] 'If memory and perceptions concur with other impression at a particular occasion' – what other impressions are there? What does it mean for them to 'concur' with one another? – 'then they seem to me to inscribe words in our soul, as it were' (39a1-3) Whatever the 'other impressions' are meant to be, it does at least make the point that Socrates is giving a minimal, and not an exhaustive account of what is going on in the mind or soul whenever a judgement is made.

[86] The choice of a painter in particular seems an unfortunate consequence of the necessity of choosing something and the prejudice for the visual. But Socrates specifically includes 'other sense-perceptions' among the occasions that engage the second craftsman's energies, and it is well that he does so. For we can thereby register the point, and have sympathy for a whole range of mental events which could not be done justice if we supposed they were captured by the soul only in the words that assert various facts and judgements we have come to about the world.

[87] So two hopes, even if expressed in the same proposition, could have a different meaning.

[88] Hence the accusation that Plato confused seeing the picture of pleasure with taking pleasure in the picture. (Cf. esp. Gosling [1960]; Gosling and Taylor [1982])

[89] One might compare the problem of the humunculisation of the three parts of the soul in the *Republic*. Cf. Annas [1981]; Irwin [1995].

[90] Soon the work opportunities for the painter will be expanded – twice it is emphasised (39c12, 39e1-2) that the impressions do not come merely from immediate sense experience, but concern the past, present, and

future.

[91] Richard Sorabji points out to me that the notion that pleasure is evaluative was not unique to Plato in antiquity. What is, I think, unique, is the attention Plato gives to the conditions and consequences of this, thereby fitting it into an overall view of persons, lives, and value.

[92] Contra Burnyeat [1995], according to whom, Plato in the *Theaetetus* 'had argued that there is no awareness in perception itself, just a causal interaction with sensible qualities in the environment' (pg. 21).

[93] Although admittedly, for different reasons from Aristotle's. For Aristotle, the 'shaping' of a sense experience took place in the sense organ, while for Plato the fact that no experience was ever utterly formless shows that anything, even sensation, if it is to become something for us at all, must have contact with something that *can* give from (meaning, structure, sense, place), namely: the soul. Cf. *Theaetetus* 184 and J. Cooper [1970].

[94] As was discussed in Chapter 3.

[95] Chapter 3 brought out this same contrast between Protarchus' and Socrates' relation to the words of the wise in the cosmological argument.

[96] Again, this would be arrogating to man, whose goodness lies in trying to become wise, the goodness of the divine.

[97] And this not because he happened once to stumble on a belief that chanced to be more or less right. Because the universe is systematically inter-related, truth follows upon truth (for those committed to following it, as the good man – on the rationalist view – is).

[98] Cf. D. Frede [1985] and Hampton [1987] for contrasting and insightful discussion of this passage.

[99] Cf. Williams [1959] 57-59

[100] Cf. Lovibond [1990] esp. 225

[101] 54e-55c. This will be discussed in the final section of Chapter 5.

[102] He could, of course, deny that there are persons at all – this may not be a position distinct from the view that 'good persons' are simply whatever locations have frequent and intense pleasures.

[103] Plato's sense of *genesis*, in the *Philebus* at least, may well be intended to encompass Aristotle's '*energiea*', and not contrast with it, as Aristotle supposes (*Nicomachean Ethics X1-5*). If so, the significance of *genesis* for

Plato cannot be that it is a process.

[104] Thus that Platonist in spite of himself, Friedrich Nietzsche, held that one of the most significant features of human beings was not that they could achieve this or that, but that they set their ideals in such as way that achieving them only opened up higher ideals. The 'self-overcoming', rather than the self that was overcome or about to come, was the characteristically human.

[105] *Phaedo*, esp. 66e-69e,117c; *Crito* 44a-b

[106] When we try to apply this 'temporally fixed' solution to the notion of memories, it makes even less sense.

[107] Cf. Chapter 2.

[108] See Korsgaard [1983] for a valuable discussion of intrinsic and dependent value.

[109] It probably goes further back, but the absolute division into exactly two kinds of mental states – beliefs and desires – is often attributed to Hume, and has been invoked, and assumed unquestionable, most often in moral philosophy since his time, on whichever side of the naturalist-empiricist/transcendental idealist divide one falls. Dancy [1993] and Blackburn [1998] might be taken as two recent, and opposing, examples within this tradition.

[110] Cf. Hume [1757]1

[111] It should perhaps not be surprising, then, that Blackburn's 'expressivism' arises explicitly out of moral philosophy in the Humean vein (Cf. e.g. Blackburn [1998]). Having no resources for locating, identifying or characterising evaluation as a distinctive capacity and phenomenon, 'expressivism' simply deletes it as a category.

[112] Cf. Williams [1959] 71-72 for a similar point about the distinction between what I do and what is done to me.

[113] For Hume as adherent to the Generic Theory of Pleasure, see e.g. Hume [1757]1.

[114] A complaint of Stocker's [1996] against 'the philosophers'.

[115] Cf. the conversation Socrates is able to have with the pleasures at 63a *ff.* (discussed in Chapter 7).

Chapter 5

Against Hedonism

There is a handy and straightforward description of the *Philebus*: it is a late dialogue in which Plato depicts Socrates arguing against hedonism in favour of reason and knowledge. And some elements of the dialogue are familiar from similar projects in other dialogues.[1] So Socrates points out the painfulness inherent in many pleasures, and the erraticness and indiscriminateness of pleasure, its omnivorous variety and unreliability. But then there is also much in the *Philebus* that looks peculiar in the context of such an apparently simple argument. The peculiarity has mainly to do with the difficulty in tracing any line of argument at all. This is partly because the argument, if it is to work, must proceed simultaneously along several fronts. We need an adequate characterisation of reason, and its relations both to human beings and to their world, as much as we need a similar account of pleasure. Each of these tasks is already subtle and extensive. But in addition, the hedonist position itself is also ambiguous and complex, tricky to pin down and difficult to grasp as the kind of thing it is. If one does want to launch an attack on hedonism, the standard method of argument by counter-example is unilluminating and dissatisfying. What we will want to know is: What is it about hedonism, what sort of structural flaws are inherent in it, that it might be open to just such counter-examples?

I. Versions of Hedonism

Like pleasure, hedonism comes in many kinds – some of them more philosophically interesting, and some of them more immediately compelling (or even

plausible), than others. The most straightforward and unreflective statement of the position might be formulated in the claim that 'pleasure is good'. As it stands, this claim is still ambiguous. The apparently most innocuous, and the simplest, interpretation would construe it as the contention that pleasure is always good. The hedonist supporting such an interpretation might then want to remain agnostic about the question of other goods – whether, that is, pleasure is the *only* good, or whether there is instead anything else that is also good, either sometimes or always. He may even want to remain agnostic about whether more pleasure is better – that is, he may not be a pleasure-maximiser. There is, however, a heavy price to pay for such agnosticism.

If he is unwilling to say anything further, then the hedonist has offered us neither a criterion of value, nor an explanation of value, nor even a helpful description of what might be valuable and why. He has no resources for determining what might be more and less valuable, and no indication of whether other things might be valuable – much less what these might be, how they might be valuable, and how valuable they might be. He cannot compare one pleasure or kind of pleasure to another, much less to anything else – if there be such – that is valuable. He cannot even yet attribute value to past or future pleasures, or to means for producing pleasure. Adherence to such a hedonism cannot promise one the most pleasant life, or even a quite pleasant life; and if one happened to have a rather pleasant life, such a doctrine could not even describe that life as better than a less pleasant life, nor – because there may or may not be other worthwhile goods – could it call that life good.

If the hedonist is to avoid these consequences, then he cannot evade the question of other values, aside from pleasure. In which case, it seems, the alternative is simple: either there is or are other thing(s) , sometimes or always valuable in their own right (that is, independently of their relation to pleasure), or there are not. If the hedonist, however,

concedes any such additional values or goods, then he rapidly loses his hedonism.

For the hedonist cannot simply claim that pleasure is one good among many, even if it is something that is always good. If pleasure is just one good among many, then it is possible in any given circumstance that although pleasure is good, something else is better. Then the determination of which is in each case better will not be settled by looking simply to pleasantness. I might believe that pleasure is always of some value, but that painful self-restraint in this or that case is better. The hedonist must come to this conclusion on the basis of self-restraint being ultimately, overall or in the long term, more *pleasant* – if the conclusion is reached on other grounds, then there is some value higher than pleasure, in light of which pleasure might in some cases not be valuable at all. And this is no longer a commitment to pleasure, but to what is best, where this will only under certain circumstances turn out to be pleasure.

So the hedonist, if he allows himself any thought beyond 'pleasure is good' or 'pleasure is always good' will have to insist that pleasure is the only measure of value. It is not just the case that pleasure is *always* good; pleasure is also the *only* good. At least, that is, it is the only thing that is valuable in its own right, for its own sake. If anything else could become valuable, it would only ever be so in a different (and in a subordinate) way, in virtue of its relation to pleasure. Even if the hedonist does not believe that pleasure is the only thing that is *in any way* good, he must still hold that pleasantness is the arbiter and measure of worth, and that therefore the value of anything else is to be traced – more or less directly – to its promotion of pleasure.

Again, the hedonist might try for the simplest response – there is no other way of being valuable. Pleasure is the only thing that is good at all, in any way. A simple-minded hedonism might rest with the claim that pleasure is good, and whenever it comes up is to be pursued. Such a hedonist would reject pleasure-maximising as an aim,

refusing to acknowledge that more pleasure is always better. It is enough that something be pleasant. Once again, however, the hedonist will then have to pay a heavy price for his simple-mindedness.

Through simple-mindedness the hedonist might not need to claim that, in cases of choice, the pleasanter option is always to be preferred. But he will thereby also be able to say nothing at all about how to choose between alternatives, or generally how to go about living a life. A hedonist need not be a maximiser – but if he is not, he will not have anything else to say about the good, either. It is perhaps coherent to hold that anything is good so long as it is pleasant, while denying that anything is better to the extent that it is pleasanter. But if, as may be the case, nothing – or very little in everyday life – is wholly devoid of any pleasure, then nothing will be bad – indeed, everything will be *equally* good (regardless of *how* pleasant it is).

But the hedonist may well protest that this was never what he had in mind in the first place. There is, after all, a perfectly familiar kind of hedonism, often called 'enlightened', that allows ample space for all manner of alternative values, or goods. All kinds of things might come to acquire value, in virtue of their usefulness in promoting pleasure. Pleasure is the good – that which is responsible for the worth of anything else. But precisely because he can distinguish between *the* good and something that is derivatively good, the enlightened hedonist might allow value to many things besides pleasure. The claim that pleasure is the good to be pursued in human life need not be the strong claim that pleasure is the only thing necessary for goodness to exist – even pleasure may have its necessary conditions. But if pleasure is to be dependent upon something else for its existence, then it had better only need these as necessary conditions or as means. This carries with it the implication that if the end – pleasure – could be got in some other way, this would be no less good. The means and conditions

for pleasure can play no role in the goodness of the pleasure, otherwise its ability to suffice as an explanation of goodness will be seriously undermined.[2]

Of course few who claim that pleasure is the good intend thereby to assert that we could get along just as well – have just as much pleasure – without any cognitive faculties at all. On the contrary, many hedonists who take their moral theory seriously would even try to claim that mind and its cognates are good both because they are useful for acquiring pleasure, and because they afford distinctive – and perhaps even greater – pleasures to human beings than those available to beasts.[3] Thus it might seem at first that the hedonist need not hold the somewhat repugnant position that, although mind happens to be necessary for pleasure, if only we could have pleasure (and lots of it) without any cognitive capacities at all, this would be much better (or at least equally good). He might grant ample space to judgement, knowledge, discernment, and love of truth 'in their own right', because of the distinctive activities they are – but it will still always only be in virtue of the fact that, and insofar as, they provide pleasure, and indeed especially valuable pleasures (which for a hedonist could only mean, especially *pleasant* pleasures).

Thus the enlightened hedonist will use pleasure to evaluate comparative goods. Once we admit complexity in human lives, souls, and situations, then we can assess the relative worth of various alternatives by comparing the pleasure involved. There are, of course, various ways we might compare pleasures - some are more physical than others, some are more accepted, some are more widely shared. The hedonist, however, must maintain that the one comparison that *matters* – the only one that tells us anything about the relative worth of various pleasures – is the relative *pleasantness* involved in each case. And so, in any choice, the pleasanter option will always be the better one. Various situations, circumstances, experiences might be more or less pleasant, especially when

considered in the long term, in the context of a connected, continuous life, where what happens now helps to shape what may happen later. According to enlightened hedonism, not only is pleasure good, but pleasanter (and more pleasure) is always better. A hedonist thus easily becomes a maximiser as soon as he agrees to consider better and worse.

The simple hedonist is protected by his simple-mindedness from outright refutation; but then the price of his security is that he cannot say anything at all, nor can he be any more articulate in his actual choices in life. If this extreme simple-mindedness is unappealing, the hedonist has two choices: he can admit that there are also other values, independent of pleasure, and thus abandon hedonism altogether; or else he is pushed into the camp of the enlightened hedonist, trying to maximise pleasure, and so subordinating the value of anything else to this end. The first kind of hedonism – which wishes to rest with 'pleasure is good' or 'pleasure is always good' or 'pleasure is the only good', without being committed to anything further (most significantly, in the last case, not admitting any kind of value at all to anything else besides pleasure) – I shall call 'simple hedonism'. The second, more familiar, calculative sort of hedonism – which holds that pleasure determines and is the measure of value, and is the arbiter and cause of whatever value there might be in anything else – I shall, following convention, call 'enlightened hedonism'.

Either of these positions, as they stand, may be a descriptive, or psychological, claim: anything valued is in fact valued on account of the pleasure it gives, or is expected to give. Descriptive hedonism requires the claim that hedonism is inescapable – whatever we do, we are in fact seeking pleasure, and whatever we value it is in fact what we find pleasant, and whether we realise it or not, this pleasure is the reason for, or explanation of, the value we find. Because this is a psychological fact, there is no space for saying

that although we do tend towards pleasure, such tendencies get value all wrong. Pleasure *really is* valuable just because it is, as a matter of fact, what we all ultimately aim at and what therefore explains behaviour and value in human life. But this means that descriptive hedonism, because it redefines value in terms of pleasure, implies quite another, prescriptive, hedonism: Pleasure is in fact what is good for us, and that is what we ought to seek, whether or not we naturally incline towards, or value it.

This second sort of hedonism, because it makes normative claims about what we ought to do and value, is generally taken to be stronger than a merely descriptive hedonism. After all, description is a simple, empirical matter of recording how things are, while prescription entangles one in normative claims that are difficult to prove. But in fact, because descriptive hedonism ends up implying the normative claim in any case, it will turn out to be the stronger claim, and the more difficult to substantiate.

It is in one way the more difficult claim to defend simply because we just do not take ourselves to act and value always on account of pleasure. While it is of course open to the theorist to re-describe our actions and self-understanding to conform to his thesis, this makes him liable to the charge that all he has offered is a re-description – and perhaps not an especially informative or enlightening one.

The descriptive thesis is the stronger claim in another way, as well. For descriptive hedonism to be true, it will in any case still require that the second kind of hedonism is also true – pleasure is what we *ought* to value, because it is indeed valuable, and also the cause, source or explanation of real value.[4] If the normative claim fails, it will be very difficult to maintain the psychological one. Prescriptive hedonism, by contrast, makes no claim to account for actual behaviour and the lives people actually lead. And it can be held quite independently of whatever turns out to be the case regarding human impulses – it does not stand or fall with its descriptive counterpart. It is

therefore natural for any argument against hedonism to begin by trying to undermine the weaker, more plausible normative sort of hedonism; for if that falls, descriptive hedonism must fall with it.

II. The Enlightened Hedonist's Conception of Pleasure

The enlightened hedonist, as we saw, turns out to be a pleasure maximiser, in order to have anything at all to say about better and worse. This allows him, in a way, a diverse range of good things. But it relies, usually unreflectively, on a particular conception of pleasure. Pleasure, on the hedonist's account, is typically thought to be a result of some activity, action or experience, or another. The point of finding the pleasure itself good is to detach it from any intrinsic or necessary relation to the activity, belief, or whatever, that gave rise to it. Protarchus' early admission that the pleasures of temperance differ from those of folly does not alarm him, nor should it. He is still able to maintain that the pleasures themselves (the experiences of pleasure *qua* pleasant) are always the same. All that has changed is the object, or cause, of pleasure. And changing the means to pleasure does not change the character of the pleasure itself – at least not insofar as it is pleasant, and so also not insofar as it is valuable. Implicit in this presumption that any pleasure (and any route to pleasure) is just as good as any other (all else – that is, all other pleasure – being equal), is a notion of pleasure as both detachable and homogeneous. Pleasure, however it arose, whatever the context and history and circumstances, is basically the same stuff – a homogenous and free-floating 'mmm...'-feeling, which attaches itself without substantial alteration upon any manner of human experience. Being disconnectable from, and conjoinable to any activity or other mental state in this way, pleasure is essentially a common consequence of various factors – it is what they all lead to, or fail to lead to, one way or another. And unless the hedonist is

going to radically re-describe pleasure, so that it no longer fits anything familiar from experience, then pleasure is the sort of thing that one could always, in principle if not in fact, have more and more of. Without recourse to some other principle to decide issues of value, the enlightened hedonist will have to agree that pleasanter is always better, or else lapse into inarticulateness of simple hedonism.

III. Enlightened Hedonism and Consequentialism

Insofar as pleasure is a certain (kind of) result or product, hedonism is essentially a consequentialist approach to ethics. Any hedonism which does not lapse into a mindless and utterly unreflective position, will be more or less explicitly relying on an 'agglomerative' view of human beings and human lives, and of goodness itself. The relation between utilitarianism, hedonism and consequentialism is not incidental – enlightened hedonism is one kind, and perhaps the most popular kind, of consequentialism. So that, whatever criticisms there might be of consequentialism will also undermine hedonism.

Consequentialism, however, does not imply hedonism. All the consequentialist needs is some generic result or product, supposed to be self-evidently good, and which is therefore to be maximised. And she needs some unit of measurement suitable for every occurrence of the declared good, and some reliable way of determining an actual instance, and distinguishing this from false semblances of the desired good.

Implicit in consequentialism is the idea of the good as goods (crudely results, ends, or products), and so as something in principle – conceptually and evaluatively – separable from contexts, from circumstances and from sources. These consequences are the bearers of value, and it is in virtue of what they are and the value they bear that anything else comes to have any value. If these discrete ends, products, or results are the

bearers and source of value, then there is no basis for denying that more of them will be better.[5]

If we see the 'additive goods' notion implicit in consequentialism, we can begin to see more clearly at least one reason why one might take the hedonist thesis so seriously. It is not just that naïve or weak people might be attracted to the position as a justification of self-indulgence. It is easy enough to see that a hedonist need not be intemperate or otherwise vicious. More important than being mistaken about pleasure, or about what is good, the hedonist – like the consequentialist – is mistaken about the kind of thing goodness is, mistaken about what the conditions are for anything to have value, and for us to be able to value anything.

We might well have our suspicions about whether there is or could be any common unit of measure, at least of anything that could have any interest regarding the question of the good life for human beings. But even if we do assume that some common measure could be found, the consequentialist's difficulties are still not over, for she will find it more difficult than she had supposed to load all of the value of a thing into results as opposed to processes, intentions or whatever else leads up to, or causes, the results. It will be difficult to locate all the value in the end as opposed to the process leading up to, or the cause of, the end precisely because this distinction itself between cause/process and end cannot be taken for granted. 'Good states of affairs', after all, are not like sticks and stones that can be pointed to, tossed from one person to another, and held up against one another for comparison. Reasoning and judgement are not just needed to ascertain whether, and how much, some candidate instance is to count as a desired result; they are needed determine what is to be a candidate instance at all. And this determining is not a matter of mind selecting from a shelf of prefabricated items. Mind, judgement, calculation, discrimination, memory are required in order for anything

to become an instance; they contribute to constituting anything that is a thing at all. What the consequentialist had hoped to treat merely as an instrument for measuring and maximisation, as scales, will turn out to be involved not just in the weighing but in the character and identity of the things weighed.

This is a lapse into rationalism of a very particular sort. To say that reason is already embedded in the fabric of things, in order for them to come up as a candidate instance of a desired end in the first place, may sound like it could be just an alternative kind of consequentialism. Again, the consequentialist is not necessarily a hedonist – why shouldn't she choose rationally ordered ends to maximise?

But this misses the force of the objection and, incidentally, makes thereby a larger and less plausible claim than the rationalist needs. It would seem a grand claim to suppose that reason and judgement have been added, as another ingredient, to any existing object. One could, of course, claim flatly that this is the case. But what the rationalist objection was offering was a way of seeing what this might mean, how and why it should come to be the case that intellect is inextricable from items. And if his story of why and how this could be the case *is* correct, then consequentialism collapses.

The consequentialist response still treats the situation like a shopping-cart problem – looking at the shelf of prefabricated candidate goods (now each of them offering reason as an added ingredient), the difficulty is merely one of deciding which goods should go in the cart, which end results to select. But the rationalist's objection was that reasoning, judging and independent conceptions of value make up the fabric of the pleasures to be weighed. Reason and judgement partially constitute ends not as an extra ingredient, buy by embedding the 'end-result' within a specific context (a human soul, and *this particular* soul), attaching an end to these circumstances and objects and no other, in just this or that way. To see reasoning implicit in this way in the end result –

say, pleasure – is to deny the coherence of considering the end independently of the route to it – of considering pleasure '*qua* pleasure'. There is no common unit of measure, any generic outcome, specifiable independently of its sources and circumstances.

The rejection of hedonism on these grounds implies also the denial of an assumption crucial to consequentialism: namely, that the route to the consequences – whether, and to whatever degree, that route involves thought or serendipity – is purely incidental to the consequences themselves, both their identity and their worth. But if the 'route' there is what makes some result what it is, if a consequence cannot be picked out and fully characterised independently of its history – or, if the process of individuating, assessing and evaluating something necessarily changes the object of evaluation or is necessary for a full characterisation of the object in the first place – then consequentialism is a doomed project, whatever the results specified as 'good'.

IV. Socrates the Consequentialist

Because the consequentialist need not hold that pleasure is the good, one might try to characterise Plato's ethics generally as consequentialist, in spite of the occasions which Plato gives Socrates to speak vehemently against pleasure.[6] Plato, on this view, simply prefers maximising good states to maximising pleasure. He holds, that is to say, that the hedonist is correct in his efforts to maximise good consequences, but simply mistaken about what is to count as a good result. And this should explain Plato's ambiguous feelings towards, and his preoccupation with, hedonism across the dialogues – the hedonist has seen something importantly correct about *how to go about* giving the right account of ethical life and good generally; he is simply mistaken about what is to count as a good result.

I think this cannot be an adequate account of Plato's ethics – not overall, but

especially not in the *Philebus*. It is true, of course, that Socrates in the *Protagoras* propounds such a view.[7] Although he there endorses 'pleasure' as the good result to be aimed at, the view is clearly set out in such a way that anything could be made to stand in pleasure's stead – provided one could reason about it, identify, calculate and measure it uniformly across instances, without remainder and without recourse to some other further court of appeal (regarding what is to count as an instance, or as an optimal result). But simply by spelling out these necessary assumptions, we can see that far from proving that the hedonist is correct, the *Protagoras* arguments imply a basis of critique for *any* sort of consequentialism, and for hedonism in particular.

Whether we read the *Protagoras* as an ironical bit of sophistry or as an earnest working through of the complex underpinnings of hedonism,[8] the arguments Plato brings forward there show that he was well aware of the fact that enlightened hedonism was a kind of maximising consequentialism, and that such a view had space for mind, knowledge, thinking, judgement and so forth only instrumentally.[9] His presentation of it there may be considered rather crude – perhaps the hedonist could hold that knowledge being valued (but note: *not* valuable) in itself provided the most pleasure of all; but even such a position would be treating knowledge – in this case 'knowledge being valued in itself' – merely instrumentally.[10] Plato's stark way of drawing the contrast in the *Protagoras* forces us to keep this well in view.

V. The Philebus' Arguments Against Hedonism

To show that consequentialism, and in particular hedonism, is impossible to sustain in just these ways, is, I shall argue, the project Plato undertakes in the *Philebus*. In order to make his point, he will have to rely heavily on his metaphysical and methodological points about wholes, and how we are to understand both them and their

parts. In particular, he will rely on the claim that a human mind and a human life are – properly conceived – wholes of just the relevant sort, genuine unities on which the discussions of monads and of *peras* and *apeiron* would have some bearing. Against this background, Plato gives an exhaustive account of pleasure – one which not only attempts to do justice to the complexity and variety of pleasure in its manifold manifestations in human life, but which also thereby demonstrates the impossibility, on various levels, of finding anything that could possibly act as the *hedon*, the unit of measure of pleasure (which units it is the hedonist's desire to maximise).

The lack of a *hedon*, of course, will do far more damage to the calculative, enlightened hedonist, who believes that more pleasure is better, than to the simple hedonist, for whom it suffices that something be pleasant, without further thought, in order for it to be desirable. The simple hedonist may not necessarily be a maximiser (although, like Philebus, he may take himself to be[11]). But he has other problems. The strategy that Plato pursues in his argument against hedonism in the *Philebus* is complex, in accord with the variety of kinds and aspects of hedonism possible.[12] Therefore, it is helpful to try to outline some of the main objections to hedonism that Plato puts forward, so that we can attend to them in examining the particulars of the arguments as they unfold. In essence what will come out is a dialectical refutation of hedonism, as Protarchus – trying to carve out space for a sensible endorsement of pleasure – realises at successive points that he must choose: retain his hedonism and go the way of Philebus, or else consent to the rationalist path.

1. The Misconception of Goodness: Hedonism is vulnerable on two fronts – both in the kind of thing it supposes an 'end' to be, and in what it takes to be that end. In positing pleasure as the good, the hedonist must take 'the good' (that in virtue of which all else becomes good) agglomeratively.[13] It is something that can always become better and

better by adding more of it. Even if we ultimately fail to identify some common unit of measure to which all pleasures could be reduced, still pleasure is the kind of thing that becomes more pleasant by there being more of it.

On Plato's view, neither the good, nor the complex, intelligible wholes that make value possible – and intelligible and accessible to us – should be conceived in this way. The good does not improve by being increased. The standards of perfection, of how things ought to be, are not made better and better; 'better' does not mean 'better than good' but rather 'closer to good', just as 'straighter' means 'closer to straight' and not 'straighter than straight'.[14] It is in this light that the 'preliminary agreements' about the good at 20d appear well-chosen rather than arbitrary. Anything, to count as good, must be sufficient and complete – not only does it need nothing added to it, addition either ruins its goodness, or else proves that the thing in question was not, after all, entirely good.

2. The Distortion of Virtue: If these are arguments against hedonism, then it is the consequentialist aspect of hedonism that is one target of criticism. Like any consequentialist, the hedonist is a 'bottom-up' thinker. Value is additive (the value of any whole is just the sum of the value of all of its parts), comes in discrete pieces, and no worth can be laid on origins, contexts, relations, or consequences, except insofar as these promote or hinder pleasure. It is from the incidences of pleasure that thought, calculation, memory and knowledge become valuable. A very enlightened hedonist might argue that even virtue can thus become valuable (most hedonists usually do) – but his notion of what virtue is can only be given in terms of whatever promotes pleasure. This could only ever be, at best, a deflationary account of virtue. Another part of the incoherence of hedonism will lie in the fundamental inadequacy of consequentialism itself, trying as it does not just to *specify* good states independently of persons and lives,

but actually also to *define* the latter in terms of the former.

3. The Disappearing Agent: The hedonist will then share with the consequentialist the implications of this conception of value. Even when acts of thinking and so forth become instrumentally valuable, the thinker can only be defined as whatever instrument makes thinking possible – and the value of 'the thinker' lies strictly in the thinking's being able to promote pleasure (and so on for all the other faculties ordinarily thought to comprise persons).[15] That the coincidence of just these things in the same place at the same time, over time, (i.e. in the same person), may itself serve to characterise and confer worth on each is not a thought the hedonist can have. Persons, for the hedonist, are just instruments (occasions) for pleasure. If some means other than my reasoning, some means perhaps having nothing to do with me, proved more able to promote pleasure, then this would have to be preferred to my own engagement with the issues. And this is a problem with consequentialism generally. Persons are not primarily wholes, but rather assemblages of various sorts of requirements (or necessary conditions) for maximising good states of affairs. If the same state of affairs could be brought about by some other means, this would have to be, in principle, equally good.

4. The Problem with Pleasure: There is, moreover, the specific problem of positing *pleasure* as the good. Even on the hedonist's own territory, pleasure will prove, upon consideration, to be something that is radically ill-suited for maximising. Part of this will come to light as we gradually come to see fully what it means for pleasure to be *apeiron*, indefinite. Because of the nature of its relation to mind and judgement, memory and belief, pleasure is not up to the task of serving the necessary role in a consequentialist theory, nor is it sufficient for generating (or supporting) any other way of conceiving of sources of value. The hedonist might try to reject the view that pleasure is so implicated in its context, but then he must choose between the implausible

homogenous view of pleasure (that it always *feels* the same), or the vacuous view that pleasure is whatever feeling is desired.

5. Relapse to Simplicity: If, however, intelligent maximisation of pleasure is incoherent, the hedonist does have the option of abandoning 'maximisation', instead of pleasure. The hedonist can still embrace simple hedonism – all and only pleasure is good – utterly undifferentiated by quality or measure, calculation or even preference. Goodness is still defined in atoms of generically identical states, but even the quantity and duration of these is a matter of indifference.

What these amount to, taken together, is a determined attack against the apparent middle ground of 'enlightened hedonism' – and on two fronts, both as a doctrine about undifferentiated pleasure, and as a doctrine that the detachable results of actions are 'things to be aimed at'. In the light of this, the original argument against simple Phileban hedonism, presented in the Trial of Lives at 20d *ff.*, will begin gradually to take on more significance in retrospect. The maximising hedonist might not be forced to adopt the rationalist position – but the price of his refusal is that he must end up not an enlightened hedonist at all, but rather a simple one. And just how simple and mindless becomes more and more clear as we see how dependent most human pleasures are on our natures as minded beings. It is a simple-minded position indeed, and the inarticulate mindlessness of it underlies the eloquence of Philebus' marginalisation and ultimate silence, and the force of Socrates' vivid 'mollusc' argument. If the hedonist is inclined to reject Phileban mindless hedonism because 'that is not a life at all', then his days as a hedonist are numbered. For he wants a *life*, as human beings understand and use the term, and not just a series of sensations.

Ironically, it will be the rationalist who must rescue pleasures from the flattening distortions of the mindless hedonist. The value pleasure can and does have is not a self-

evident fact, empirical or psychological. It is something that comes to be only through understanding.

VI. Strategy in the Philebus

What exactly is the hedonist's claim? From the very beginning, Protarchus' task was to defend the claim that 'what is good for all creatures is to enjoy themselves, to be pleased and delighted, and whatever else goes together with that kind of thing' (11b). As we have seen, this statement actually embraces several different positions, each demanding a different sort of argument. The progress of the *Philebus* is a gradual disambiguation of this hedonist claim. Like the mapping of varieties of hedonism above, the disambiguation will proceed in conversation with the hedonist, posing to him alternative interpretations of his claim and forcing him to choose – or to refuse to choose, which carries its own consequences.

First, pleasure is brought to trial, to test whether the hedonist wants to claim that pleasure is the only thing good in any way at all. In the face of the implications of adhering to such a view, Protarchus quickly abandons it.[16] The alternative is to make his hedonism more sophisticated – pleasure is the explanation of goodness, the justification or cause of the value of anything else. As this option is explored, the figure of Philebus and his mindless life remains hovering in the background.

We know from the resistance he offers to the plurality of pleasure (12d-13c), from his lengthy protest speech (19a-20a), from his rejection of the notion of false pleasures (36c-40e) that Protarchus is not a push-over. We gather from his requests for clarification at 13a6, 14c5, 17a6-7, and 26c8 that Protarchus is not shy. Following the initial discussion of false pleasures, he is still registering objections and impatience and demanding clear explanations (42d9, 44b3-4, 51b1, 53c9-e3, 58a7-b2, 60e8-9, 66d8-9).

So he has not simply been cowed into submission, overwhelmed and exhausted by Socrates' verbiage. If, then, we are tempted in the discussion of pleasure, to think Protarchus is too pliable, too easily won over, we are invited to consider again: *Could* he have rejected the path Socrates has opened up? Could he have refused to follow – without, that is, relapsing into a mindlessness of simple hedonism, essentially just refusing to give grounds or explanations?

After he has followed the rationalist in rejecting simple hedonism the first time round, Protarchus must decide whether he can refuse to acknowledge the independent value of truth, without falling back into simplicity. The Good Man Argument shows up just then (39e10-40c2), and by accepting it Protarchus again affirms the importance of persons, and the non-incidental connection between persons, lives, and experiences. After the exposition of distorted pleasures that misrepresent the pleasure they are entitled to,[17] Protarchus is offered the enlightened hedonist's last refuge from simplicity: inverse-hedonism. Protarchus attempts, without endorsing, a metaphysical rejection of this option. Radical flux-theorists are introduced and dismissed (42d9-43a9) before Philebus himself is dragged into discussion again, indirectly, as his view is contrasted with that of the entirely-too-enlightened hedonism of his enemies (44b5-6). Confronted with these two alternatives, it is no wonder that the enlightened hedonist chooses to follow Socrates instead.

VII. The First Argument Against Hedonism

Plato's first attack on hedonism serves to divide hedonists against themselves. This is dramatised and personified when Protarchus, speaking as the hedonist's representative, repudiates the life of mindless pleasure. In the face of Protarchus' dismay at the prospect of actually *using* the Divine Method to settle the disagreement about the

good for man, Socrates turns abruptly to address the original problem more directly. After some crucial preliminary agreements, he suggests, 'Let us put the life of pleasure and the life of knowledge on trial, and reach a verdict by looking at them separately' (20a1-2).[18] We might suppose that Socrates grants his own view too much ground, in assuming that the evaluation of pleasure as the Good for human beings is to be made by exploring how a life could be lived under the governance of such a doctrine. Protarchus, however, does not object. And so we might worry that Plato has enabled Socrates to win the day by granting him a push-over interlocutor. After all, a greater hedonist, utterly untroubled by questions of consistency, continuity and coherence – a hedonist such as Philebus presumably is, given his unwillingness (inability?) even to discuss hedonism enough to advocate it – might not even allow that the question of the shape and character of a human life so lived could have any bearing at all on the value of pleasure.

But Philebus also could not care enough to *object* to the strategy. More to the point, if one is convinced, as Protarchus presumably is or was, that goodness, lives and in fact all wholes, are built out of an accumulation (a mere stringing together) of their (independently specifiable) parts, one would have no grounds for objecting that viewing the life lived according to hedonist doctrine could in any way damage or distort the position that pleasure is the good. If the whole just is the sum of the parts, then the hedonist is allowed no objection to viewing the life of mindless pleasure as a whole, instead of in isolated bits. On the other hand, if the whole somehow is responsible for determining the character that the parts take on, when they are taken together, then there must be some way of specifying the whole which does not just appeal to its components.[19] And it will then fall to the nature of this 'whole' to explain the very nature of the parts involved, and so to explain whatever worth they may have. This would, though, undo the consequentialist thinking on which hedonism rests.

The illustration of the life of pleasure totally devoid of mind is perhaps already enough to make any sensible person's stomach turn.

> Since you would not be in possession of either reason, memory, knowledge, or right judgement, must you not be in ignorance, first of all, about this very question, whether you were enjoying yourself or not, given that you were devoid of any kind of intelligence?. . . Moreover, due to lack of memory, it would be impossible for you to remember that you ever enjoyed yourself, and for any pleasure to survive from one moment to the next, since it would leave not memory. But, not possessing right judgement, you would not realize that you are enjoying yourself even while you do, and, being unable to calculate, you could not figure out any future pleasures for yourself. You would thus not live a human life but the life of a mollusk or one of those creatures in shells that live in the sea.
>
> (21b-d)

But it is not mere bogey-mongering that Plato is indulging in. This is the first, and a very vivid, suggestion of just how deep the 'cognitive' goes with us. This will return in the first discussion of false pleasure. Mind, knowledge, memory, judgement and belief extend throughout every sort and instance of human experience. We could, in fact, scarcely imagine what it would be to have an 'experience' utterly devoid of all of these things, much less to have a lifetime filled only with a succession of such unarticulated sensations. It may be that such a life is in fact impossible for a human being to achieve, so anyone who claimed to be pursuing it would be living a lie. The sustained attempt to disregard continuity would betray the disingenuousness of the life and person: he would need precisely sustained effort and focus in order to contrive a life that is (or rather, can

only ever have the mere appearance of being) utterly disjointed. This, of course, would scarcely carry weight as an objection to someone who repudiated the value of thought, truth and consistency.[20]

But in fact such discontinuity could not describe any human life ever lived – at best it could only resemble or caricature the life of the tyrant admired so much by Callicles in the *Gorgias*. But even he, presumably, was aware of his pleasures as he had them (what else could make them *his*?), and he certainly planned further pleasures, and most likely recollected past pleasures (both recollecting and anticipating themselves constituting current pleasures). He might have been doomed always to act against himself, but he could at least recognise the value of his life, and things in it, being his and from him, rather than belonging to someone else. So far as it mattered to him that his life, and the pleasures in it, were his own, even Callicles was responsive to the significance of the agent in considerations of value. Anyone willing and able to engage in conversation, then, might rightly declare with Protarchus that the utterly mindless life is 'not sufficient or worthy of choice for either man or animal' (22b), agreeing with Socrates' assessment of the life as 'not a human life' at all.

The concession that the mindless life of pleasure would not be just as good as any other accumulation of the same amount of pleasure means that pleasure cannot be the ultimate or the only good. This is why it, along with Socrates' candidate, loses the first prize (22b2-5). If, however, the mere existence of pleasure does not suffice to make a life good, it may still be that everything else good in a life is good because and insofar as it contributes to pleasure. On the side of enlightened hedonism, then, one would argue that the mindless life is not good precisely because it excludes many pleasures, and makes the accumulations and maximisation of them impossible.[21] Pleasure may indeed explain the value of every isolated part within a human life. It is 'that for the sake of which'

everything else exists, or happens as it happens – the ground of justification and explanation. But pleasure's being good will itself need a justification or explanation – it can no longer be taken as a self-evident truth – for pleasantness alone clearly cannot suffice as an adequate explanation of goodness or even of desirability. If it is to have authority over other goods, lending other goods their value in virtue of its own, pleasure will have to be something beyond a formless sensation.

It might seem at first that, after this initial and rapid capitulation, Protarchus will have an easy road ahead of him. After all, in conceding that the life of mindless pleasure was no life for a human being, all he was doing was stating the genuine hedonist claim more explicitly. Pleasure was never intended to be the *only* good of any kind. It acts rather as the justification and explanation of the worth of anything else.

VIII. The Pivot

Plato introduces this first argument, against unmitigated hedonism, early in the dialogue. Breaking up the two discussions of *peras* and *apeiron* as it does, the Trial of Lives follows the comments on method and monads. Because of this sequence, the reader is able to be struck by a methodological detail which might otherwise slip by unnoticed. The Trial of Lives does not put pleasure and mind on trial, but rather the *life* of pleasure and the *life* of the mind. The preceding discussion of the significance of treating things as wholes shows that it is not incidental that the objectionableness of hedonism is most keenly felt when the life is considered as a whole. When we come to the Trial of Lives, we have just had a lesson in the implications of the principle of one and many: a whole must be considered as a unity, and its plurality understood in terms of that unity. By the time pleasure is addressed directly for a second time at 31b, the second discussion of *peras* and *apeiron* has grounded the earlier claims in a general

picture of the constitution of anything knowable, including the universe itself. Reason can exist as it is and function as it does, at a local level, because the universe itself is a whole – that is, a unity whose parts become perspicuous in virtue of the unity they are part of.

Although Protarchus ended the Trial of Lives by articulating a commonly held stance towards pleasure, and apparently not giving much ground to the rationalist, the interim discussion of the nature of 'everything existing' has begun to spell out the magnitude of the disputed ground at issue. Unfolding the implications of the very possibility of knowledge and understanding and judgement has also laid the groundwork for illuminating the ways and reasons in which hedonism is seriously mistaken – the ground on which any enlightened hedonism cannot possibly stand. Whether or not we personify 'divine mind' as Zeus, the conviction that things generally can be known or explained, and the agreement that explanation does not work 'from the ground up' – that is, agglomeratively or accumulatively – but rather proceeds from whole to parts, from unity to plurality, will work to pull the carpet out from under the confidently common-sensical enlightened hedonist.

Two advantages to Plato's way of undermining hedonism in the *Philebus* become clear as the argument unfolds. First, it will explain both why Plato seems so often to take hedonism seriously, and why many – sometimes even reasonable – people have been attracted to hedonism, and even convinced that it *must* be right. And second, the nature of his criticisms of hedonism leave it quite open to incorporate pleasure in a good life, and even to appreciate its pleasantness. The account of pleasure offered even invites us to do so. Being anti-hedonist does not require, as Plato shows, that one also be anti-pleasure. The objections he has to pleasure and desire as ends and governors of human life give us the conceptual space to reject naturalism and its close partner utilitarianism,

without thereby being forced to embrace transcendental idealism.

IX. The Significance of Falsity

Satisfied that the metaphysical ground has been adequately prepared, Socrates finally turns these points to the task of elucidating the nature of pleasure.[22] Only once this more general work has been done, does he attempt once again to assess the potential value of pleasure, by considering false pleasures (36c). As we have seen,[23] Socrates' first attempt to convince his interlocutor fails, and his second attempt, although more successful, still does not impress the point fully upon the reluctant hedonist. Even after he has accepted the possibility of 'propositionally false' pleasures, Protarchus still emphatically resists Socrates' claim that we will not 'find any other way to account for badness in the case of pleasures unless they are false' (40e8-9).

If it is so difficult to bring the hedonist round, and since it puts a significant strain on common idiom, we might wonder why Socrates insists on pleasures being true and false in the first place. Instead of circumventing the 'weighty controversy' (36d3), Socrates maintains

> if it is relevant to what we were discussing before, you worthy son of that man, it ought to be taken up. . .[and so] we shall have to forego any excursions here or any discussion of whatever side issues are not directly relevant to our topic. (36d6-10)

It seems that, as advocate of thinking and knowledge, Socrates has rather stacked the deck in his own favour, by using his own criterion – truth – to distinguish between pleasures. Perhaps we should no more allow truth to count in classifying pleasures than we would allow pleasantness to govern our classification of knowledge.

In fact, the two cases are not symmetrical; and there are, I think, at least three

good reasons for Socrates to insist on this point:

First, there is the problem of finding a common criterion to distinguish between pleasures in any way. Socrates obviously cannot follow conventional ways of speaking and categorise the pleasures as 'good' and 'bad' – this really would be to stack the deck, and to beg precisely the question that is under dispute; similarly, he cannot fall into distinguishing between pleasures that are 'really pleasures' and that are 'not really pleasures'. Equally unsatisfactory would be simply to distinguish between 'greater' and 'lesser' pleasures – this would blot out exactly the qualitative differences, and the reasons for qualitative differences in pleasure that Socrates is keen to bring to light, and that Protarchus' early 'pleasure *qua* pleasure' stance made it impossible to see.

Second, it is not clear that 'truth' is or can be Socrates' special prerogative. It may be that the hedonist is forced to accept truth and falsity as a viable distinction if he is to engage in conversation at all – if, that is, he is to resist becoming a 'Phileban hedonist'. It may indeed turn out that in this the hedonist has bitten off more than he can chew; but the alternative would then be not to bite at all, and remain like 'one of those creatures in shells that live in the sea' (21c7-e1).

Third, Socrates may be insisting on treating pleasures as 'true' and 'false' in order to make a strong claim about pleasure. However various they might be, all pleasures will involve some aspect of intelligence in them, in virtue of which it will actually be appropriate – and not just a default position – to attribute to them truth and falsity. And it will be in virtue of this aspect that we are able to distinguish one pleasure or pain from another, or pleasure from any other psychic phenomenon.

X. Truth and Persons

When Socrates begins the classification of pleasures into true and false,

according to their different sorts of falsity, it may not yet be clear how, or how much, this is supposed to count against the hedonist thesis. If the hedonist himself is not committed to truth for his own reasons, then it may seem that he can willingly accept that some pleasures may be false, while insisting that it is nonetheless only their pleasantness, not their falsity, that makes them valuable or otherwise. Even if he agrees that pleasure can be propositionally – or in any other way – false, he needs some reason to suppose that falsity generally, and false pleasure in particular, is a bad thing.[24] Socrates therefore follows up his exposition of the first kind of falsity in pleasure with the Good Man Argument. Part of the aim of this argument is to show that the hedonist is as committed to his pleasures being true as any lover of truth.

One might worry about the elision between the 'goodness' of the man, and the 'truth' of his pleasures. Doesn't that rather beg the question? Protarchus readily concedes that 'a man who is just, pious, and good in all respects [is] also loved by the gods' (39e10). But the defendant of enlightened hedonism might feel that Protarchus has given up rather too easily to conventional notions of the value of truth.[25] Perhaps a hedonist might still embrace the fact that pleasures can be true or false, while still claiming pleasure is the good.[26] Let pleasures be true and false; so long as they are pleasant, truth can go hang! This flat-out denial of any relevance at all of truth to the worth of something is possible, in a way – but endorsing it would land the hedonist in the Phileban boat of indiscriminate hedonism, a position which cannot even be articulated (for discussion demands taking truthfulness as an ideal), much less defended.[27] Moreover, such a view would seem to have no place at all for good persons, and this fact will return to haunt the hedonist at the end of the discussion of pleasure.[28] Protarchus has already conceded that human beings, at least, are the kind of beings that have lives, so rejecting the value of truth is no longer an option to him.

But perhaps it was not fair to have pushed the hedonist to one extreme or the other – either a wholesale commitment to truth, or a total refusal to grant it any value. He might, after all, have merely a partial, utilitarian, commitment to truth. 'We hedonists accept truth as a good only insofar as it enhances pleasure.' This was, after all, how reason got into the life of pleasure in the first place.

But to suppose this in between position might be possible betrays a failure to acknowledge what is required in order to be able to recognise the truth at all. For the enlightened hedonist would presumably like to say that he is sufficiently concerned with truth, and sufficiently competent at reasoning, to perceive when he is pleased that he is pleased, to recollect past pleasure and plan future pleasures, and to compare one pleasure with another in order to calculate their respective magnitudes, and hence choice-worthiness from a hedonist perspective. These at least were the things specifically missing in the Phileban life, which made it so unappealing. And this is hardly a ringing endorsement of reason, judgement and knowledge as such and for their own sake.

But this commitment to truth only with respect to pleasures cannot, in fact, be as qualified as the hedonist might like. In the first place, being able to calculate truly, even if only about pleasure, will depend on knowing all kinds of truths not directly feeding into the calculation. One must be able to think clearly about what pleasure is and about what the object of pleasure is, in each case; and this in turn will depend upon having an accurate conception of human experience generally – what our capacities are, and what the world is for us. This is part of what it meant for the cosmos, and a person within it, to be an integrated whole. This was agreed to in the cosmological passage (28d-30d) and seems to be a presumption without which reasoning would come to a halt. If we are to try to understand anything at all, we must start from the thought that it is an intelligibly ordered thing we are trying to understand.

The consequences of this even for the cautious hedonist – the one willing to make reason only the servant of the passions – begin to be unravelled when the discussion of pleasure gets pushed back one step further to a discussion of memory (33c8, 34a9 *ff.*), and again one step further to a discussion of perception (33c9-43a8). For the other side of the commitment to accurate calculations comes from the unity of a person. It is not just that accurate calculation demands wide-ranging and indiscriminate acquaintance with facts. Because the cosmos is genuinely a unity, a well put-together whole, and we are, within that, similarly genuinely unified (28c-30c), all manner of memory, judgement, belief and evaluation are already implicit in any pleasure, before any calculation or comparison *between* pleasures even gets started.[29] Such capacities are truth-oriented, and their correct functioning will affect the pleasures in which they are implicated.

This inter-dependency will become especially clear when Socrates turns from propositionally false pleasures to those that are false by distortion. Even a commitment to reason *because* such a commitment is necessary for pleasure, or certain kinds of pleasure, or maximising pleasure, cannot be simply a commitment to reason only *insofar* as it contributes to the pleasure in life. Any commitment to reason, we shall see, must be a global commitment to truth as such.

When Protarchus protests that, concerning *other* kinds of pleasures, at least, 'it is not at all because they are false that we regard pleasures or pains as bad, but because there is some other grave and wide-ranging kind of badness involved' (41a1-4), we might impatiently think that he has missed the point of the foregoing discussion. We may also be inclined to think that he has by now abandoned the hedonist cause altogether.[30] Yet he is at least careful to say that it is for other reasons that pleasures and pains are *regarded* as bad – by those who *do* regard them as bad. And in this he would

be right – those who reject pleasure are seldom concerned primarily with pleasure's veracity. But there may indeed be not so very much of the hedonist position left to be defended. Already Protarchus, in the interests of an enlightened hedonism, has accepted that truth matters. And in the first discussion of false pleasures he has also accepted that mind and judgement can discriminate true from false pleasures, while pleasure cannot itself discriminate truth from falsehood. Truth is an independent standard or criterion that cannot be placed in the service of pleasure.

More importantly, Protarchus has accepted the Good Man Argument, which established a non-incidental relationship between the goodness of a human *psyche* and the truth of its pleasures.[31] True pleasures do not make a soul good – rather, good souls make pleasures true ones. Should Protarchus have accepted the Good Man Argument? A sceptic might suspect Plato of cheating here. A better question, I think, is: Could Protarchus have rejected it? – and at what price?

He might want, and it might seem perfectly plausible to common sense, to reject the initial premise that the good man is also loved by the gods. On the Socratic reading of all these terms, the argument goes through neatly – the good man is the one whose soul is oriented towards truth, which could not help but entail that his pleasures, as his beliefs, are by and large true. Perhaps Protarchus does not, or should not, accept that whole view (most likely, he does not quite understand it). But if the hedonist rejects the Socratic understanding of the argument, *and* rejects the conventional view, then the burden has fallen to him to explain the relations between a person and his pleasures, and then between the goodness of a man and goodness generally (or 'itself'), which the hedonist must identify with pleasure. If a person is just the location or occasion for pleasant (or painful) experiences, then being a good person will be a matter of being good at maximising pleasure – presumably his own – with the result that it hardly makes

sense to think of there being someone there to 'own' the pleasures at all.[32] This is the 'absurd' position Protarchus will reject at the very end of the discussion of pleasures.[33] But in order to avoid dragging in other values and thus compromising his hedonism, the hedonist will have to be able, somehow or another, to define a person and his goodness in terms of pleasure, without recourse to some independently specified criteria of, say, unity or consistency.

With respect to the first concern raised about Protarchus' emphatic response – that he has not quite got the point of the agreements he has just reached with Socrates – it is perhaps to be remembered that so far Socrates has not, at least not explicitly, yet argued that the structure that makes truth and falsity relevant to some pleasures will be found in all, or at least in most, pleasures. But while the discussion only focused on hopes, it did at least cover a broader ranger of pleasures than that. For the discussion partners agreed that the assertions or judgements involved might concern the past, present, or future. It should, therefore, pertain to memories and current joys or sufferings, as well as to anticipations. In addition, desire was already defined (36a-b) as a combination of perception of a lack and hope; since hopes are implicated in the first description of false pleasures, desires would have to follow immediately in their wake. And once we throw desires into the mix, along with the others, we are talking about a very large number of kinds of pleasures indeed – enough that the hedonist should worry whether he can still mean anything sensible when he asserts that 'pleasure is the good', while having to exclude these sorts from the 'pleasure' he could possibly be referring to. These sorts, we have found, cannot be the good, nor the source of the value of anything else, nor the explanation of why other things are good to have in a life, and good to have here rather than there, because these pleasures are not 'these' at all – they have not got a sufficiently determinate character that they could be posited, thought of, striven for, or

determinates of the means of their own generation.[34] This is a consequence not of their falsity, so much as of what certain pleasures (hope, desire) were shown to be, and how they were shown to relate to other faculties, in the course of showing that it is possible for them to be false.

XI. The Second Sort of False Pleasures

But pleasure is even more indeterminate than the hedonist yet knows. Socrates recalls Protarchus' attention to his earlier admission that pleasure was rightly characterised as *apeiron*, in order to draw out a further aspect of pleasure's indeterminacy (41d8-9). Limit, we recall, was anything that was related as number to number or measure to measure (25b1-2); the unlimited, by contrast, included mutually exclusive, and hence mutually defining pairs, which of themselves and even together did not have the means to determine any specific measure (24a-e)). Having no definite measure in virtue of which hot is *hot* (24d), without combination with some limit in forming a complex whole, it can only be defined as being 'hotter (than something colder)'.[35] Pleasure and pain, when not firmly embedded within some particularly structured living being, become disconnected from all measure, and can only be defined relationally – pleasure is simply whatever is more pleasant than something more painful, and conversely with pain. This is not, of course, to imply that pleasures and pains could ever happen *outside* of some living creature or another, or that some *psyche* might indeed lack structure entirely. It is just that when everything is not exemplifying fully its best natural state, which will not be infrequently, one result will be that whatever was unlimited will refuse to be 'tied down by limit' (27d8), and will revert in some ways to its basic ontological status. The claims about the unity of mixed things in the metaphysical passage were, we recall, at once ontological and normative.[36] Each

mixture was defined as what it is in terms of what it would ideally be; at the same time, the possibility of error, or of 'falling short', was accommodated by including aspects which, taken by themselves (as they scarcely can be), were indefinite.

That pleasure and pain are indeed mutually co-defining was simply asserted by Socrates at the beginning of the passage on pleasure, and Protarchus allowed it to pass (31e8). And the initial definition of pleasure as restoration to one's natural state already implies a lack, and it is just this lack which is painful.[37] Now Plato moves to spell out the further implications of this interdependency, and also tries to make the whole account more plausible by appealing to common phenomenology.

He begins by taking up what was only a suggestion in the previous discussion,[38] asking whether 'it happens only to eyesight that seeing objects from afar or close by distorts the truth and causes false judgements?' (41e7-42a1). Experiences of pleasure and pain are like perception, in particular vision, in this respect: just as seeing something huge can impress upon us the smallness of something not really small at all, the experience of pain (say) can impress upon us the pleasantness of an experience which is not really that pleasant at all. Thus they are also like perception in striving to perceive or experience things as they actually are.

> It is because they [pleasures and pains] are alternatively looked at from close up or far away, or simultaneously put side by side, that the pleasures seem greater compared to pain and more intensive, and pains seem, on the contrary, moderate in comparison with pleasures. (42b2-6)

Both the pain (or pleasure) being very great can make other pleasures (or pains) that come in their ordinary size appear – that is, be felt as – small by comparison, *and* the immediate presence or very close proximity of pain or pleasure can distort our perception of just how painful or pleasant it is. Thus while 'earlier it was true and false *judgements*

which affected the respective pleasures and pains with their own condition. . .now it applies to the pleasures and pains themselves' (42b6-b2). Pleasures and pains are now responsible for how *other* pleasures and pains come to us.

Plato is not so foolish as to suppose that any pleasure must have an explicit proposition dragging it along, even if this characterisation may cover more pleasures than we might have initially expected.[39] But this is not the only way in which pleasure and pain are dependent on 'the cognitive' both for their generation, and for their character. As was implied in the first discussion of false pleasure (37a-40e), pleasures and pains are themselves kinds or ways of assessing the status of situations, partially constitutive of the perception or evaluation of circumstances.[40] They are not independent of what is involved in 'seeing things as they are'[41] – homogeneous bits of pleasure and pain do not just get stuck on to pristine perceptions or judgements.[42] Especially because there are natural pleasures, because pleasure is most naturally the perception of the movement (or likelihood of movement, in the case of hope) to a genuinely better state (31c-32b), the hedonist position can both seem attractive, and be an important opponent for Plato. After all, if pleasure is the perception or experience of improvement,[43] then hedonism would seem to be the doctrine that asserted the desirability of seeking to improve ourselves into our best possible state. It would explain part of what might motivate the ordinary intuition that pleasure is self-justifying, the end-point of explanation, or always a reason to some extent.

But this also reveals the ground of the disagreement between Plato and the hedonist, and why the hedonist is particularly dangerous. For if pleasure can be (part of?) at least *a* way of perceiving goodness, then to take all desires as given, all pleasures as good in virtue of their pleasantness, will be to make oneself permanently incapable of ever getting a clear or proper view of these matters. Hedonism (and the view of pleasure

required by it, which is often unreflectively adopted even by non-hedonists as the truth about pleasure) takes the capacity for discernment and appreciation which is pleasure as already fully constituted, as given by nature – rather than in need of training and discipline by attentiveness to truth, as all faculties of perception and cognition are. And taking them simply as given, the hedonist must endorse whichever direction in which 'tastes' in pleasures develop – provided it ensures lots of pleasures, true or false, he has no hedonic grounds for objecting. Such a conception of, and attitude towards, pleasure is a positive hindrance to allowing our pleasures and pains to mature in line together with the development of our judgement and perception.

Like perception, then, experiences of pleasure and pain can become distorted with respect to the measure of their pleasantness and painfulness. We recognise this in observations such as, 'It would not be quite so enormously pleasant to be inside, had I not just been out in the cold and rain.' In such recognitions, we allow that there is an appropriate pleasure to be got from being inside, warm and dry – which appropriate pleasure is accentuated by the proximity of painful cold in this instance. Thus, Socrates feels justified in finding something false about an otherwise natural pleasure. He concludes:

> But if you take that portion of them by which they appear greater or smaller than they really are, and cut it off from each of them as a mere appearance and without real being, you will neither admit that this appearance is right nor dare to say that anything connected with this portion of pleasure or pain is right or true. (42b8-c4)

XII. The Pleasure-Haters

Protarchus has by now conceded that pleasures are rightly evaluated in terms of truth. In the face of the illustrations of the many ways in which intellect is implicated in

pleasure, it would have been difficult for him to object, without falling back into the stubborn insistence that pleasure *qua* pleasure is always good. Protarchus has instead chosen to acquiesce to Socrates' arguments. But there is one last alternative to following the rationalist all the way. Protarchus could become very enlightened indeed in his hedonism, and Socrates will show him how.

One might go in for radical re-description. There are those who 'hold that everything the followers of Philebus call pleasures are nothing but escape from pain' (44c1-2). Rather than pleasure and pain each being distinct experiences, in contrast with some third neutral state, one might believe 'that there are only two: pain being an evil in human life, and liberation from pain, also called pleasure, being the good as such' (44b1-2). This identity between painlessness, pleasure and the good presents quite a distinctive brand of hedonism, one which is as crucial to the rationalist as to the friend of pleasure.

Although this is nominally a kind of hedonism, it is a bitter pill to have to swallow as a price to remaining devoted to pleasure, and Protarchus is not very receptive to the idea. And because it is *only* nominally a kind of hedonism, it will prove to be a position that the rationalist, too, must take care to avoid. For one of the complaints against rationalism is the charmlessness of the life it supposedly advocates. Callicles had searingly called it the life of a stone (*Gorg.* 494b1). Let the pleasure-hater call his beloved neutral state something else, say 'the good' – now he is no longer, it seems, a hedonist but a fine rationalist. And if something like the life advocated by the pleasure-haters is all the rationalist will have to offer, even Philebus' life of simple hedonism begins to look less unattractive.

The first move of the exposition is familiar. Already at 21a-22d and at 32e-33c we have seen Socrates describe some 'middle', pleasureless-painless, state; and already Protarchus has accepted the notion as coherent without the hint of objection. Now

suddenly, the sleeping hedonist wakes (although there may be nothing necessarily hedonist about his objecting to this here, in this way). The definitions of pain and pleasure as destruction and restoration of a nature are repeated; Protarchus accepts them readily, but when asked 'what if nothing happens to our body, what then?' he replies, 'When could that ever happen Socrates?' (42d8-9). Socrates clarifies that he was asking about a conceptual point, not just asking for information about phenomenology. Then the flux-theorists, who might stand behind Protarchus' protest, are nevertheless quickly introduced into the conversation, and even more rapidly dismissed with a hearty 'So be it'.

Why does Protarchus suddenly dig in his heels just here? And why does he, or rather Socrates on his behalf (43a1-3), call the *flux-theorists* as witnesses? Whatever Protarchus' motives for his pointless objection (42e1), it allows the reintroduction of the fragmentary non-life into the discussion. If, on the basis of eternal flux (43a3), one wishes to avoid the theory of mind and normativity supported by the rationalist by denying that anything is ever stable, then one's portrait of a life, world and self will be in danger of sharing with Philebus' a lack of unity and coherence.[44] In offering a way 'to avoid this argument that now assails us' (43a6), Socrates has the opportunity to clarify the double nature of pleasure and experience generally.

Pleasure and pain do not arise from just any destruction and restoration of one's nature – for we do not 'notice when we grow or experience anything of that sort'. Protarchus agrees (43b). But pleasure is not *just* a physical fact – it is also always something felt. So that, strictly speaking, only a *felt* change will be able to count as pleasure or pain (43c4-5).[45] This is an important clarification, for it will allow the possibility of 'true pleasures' – pleasures totally unmixed with any pain (51a *ff.*). It also brings out explicitly the two-fold character of pleasure. There is on the one hand the

natural 'fact of the matter', about whether there is movement in a natural organism's state, and whether this movement is an improvement or not. And there is on the other hand, the feeling or sensation. These will not always both appear, and it is when they become disjoined that pleasure-feelings begin to lose any basis in reality.

In accepting Socrates' way out of the objection posed by the flux-theorists (that there is no neutral state), Protarchus has implicitly renounced Philebus for a final time. What he will find, however, is that this has also closed to him the option of the most enlightened hedonism of all, advocated here by men 'with a tremendous reputation in natural sciences, who say there is no such thing as pleasures at all' (44b8-9).

Because this account ends by identifying painlessness and pleasure and the good (44b2), it is difficult to know whether to call it an anti-pleasure doctrine (on the grounds that they deny the pleasantness of what are ordinarily called pleasures [44c1-2], and deny even the reality of pleasure [44b8-9], and because of the 'inordinate hatred they have conceived against the power of pleasure [44c7-8]); or whether it is better called a doctrine of inverse-hedonism (because the aim of minimising pain takes the place of the aim of maximising pleasure[46]); or whether it is best called an extreme sort of enlightened hedonism (the consequences of really taking all things into consideration when deciding what is pleasant 'all things considered', and painlessness apparently being choiceworthy because it is most pleasant). At any rate their doctrine is reasonably clear – their suspicion of pleasure, especially of extreme pleasures, leads them to advocate the life of the stone. These are the enemies of Philebus because they re-describe his pleasures and his hedonism out from under him.[47] But their severity is no less threatening to the rationalist.

It is very significant, therefore, that Plato has Socrates deliberately distinguish this view from his own. They are introduced as 'pleasures and pains in animals that are

even falser than these, both in appearance and reality' (42c5-6). Many an argument against hedonism has tried to proceed by demonstrating that the things we ordinarily consider to be pleasant are 'not *really* pleasures' at all. The objection to hedonism is that conventional pleasures are not *pleasant* enough. But this plays into the hedonist's hand – one has not objected to setting pleasure as the ultimate good and end in life; rather one has simply accepted the hedonist principle, while squabbling over whether this or that is to be called a pleasure. In this inverse hedonism, it is pain that the pleasure-hater finds intolerable, and he strives to minimise pain at all costs – even if that means denying all of the conventional pleasures are pleasant.

Socrates is clear to point out that our pleasure-hater has simply made a mistake. 'That the middle kind of life could turn out to be either pleasant or painful would be the wrong thing to think, if anyone happened to think so, and it would be the wrong thing to say, if anyone should say so' (44e8-10). But so long as he insists that he *feels* pleasure whenever he senses no change at all, he must indeed *feel* pleasure, even though there is none to be had.[48] His false theoretical views about pleasure lead him to have the falsest pleasures – falsest because there is no element of real or natural pleasure in them at all. It is a mistake the rationalist need not and should not make. And clearly identifying the hatred of pleasure and pain as mistaken, Socrates leaves space for the possibility that either might yet find a place in the well-lived life.

Because of his mistaken views on pleasure, the inverse-hedonist will be skewered on the same rejection of consequentialism as his hedonist opponents. For he shares common ground with the hedonist in his new variation on a maximising-consequentialist theme. This may be the implication of the way Socrates sets on a par 'three kinds of life, the life of pleasure, the life of pain, and the neutral life' (43d1-2).[49] The pleasure-hater also defines value in terms of some end result or consequence, and he similarly will lack

any account of persons and lives. In addition to a mistake about the kind of thing pleasure is, the inverse-hedonist has made the same structural error about what kind of thing the good is as his mirror image, the hedonist. A life, on the inverse-hedonist's account, can only be an accumulation of painless moments, and a good person is just the location of the painlessness.[50] If he *could* have a life of utter motionlessness, that would be his ideal – and his measure for success in life is how long he manages to maintain this painless state. Painlessness, like pleasure, is to be won from any source, at any cost.

The inverse-hedonist thus shares with the unreflective hedonist the perniciously false method and conception of pleasure, represented so well by Protarchus at the beginning of the dialogue. Both want to speak of 'pleasure *qua* pleasure'[51] – and suppose thereby that they have told the whole of the story, as far as what is important or valuable about pleasure. Just as the important thing for the hedonist is to set all pleasures on a par, the inverse-hedonist likewise wishes to wipe away all distinctions between the things conventionally called pleasures. He is as unable as the hedonist to discriminate between pleasures, to evaluate them in context and under various circumstances, to assess them for various qualities and worth. For the pleasure-hater, the source of value will be in 'painlessness *qua* painlessness'. Like the hedonist, he lumps all pleasures together – the hedonist accepts, and the inverse-hedonist rejects the lump. This denies the valuable role that pleasure *can* play in a well-ordered life, and insists on flattening out human experience into a binary of either good end-states or poor. By denying any variety to pleasure, the inverse-hedonist, no less than the hedonist, ends by denying precisely the rich complexity in human life that contributes to making it valuable and human.

It should be clear from this, then, that Plato includes these forbidding men of science in the discussion as sympathisers, but not authorities.[52] Their presence serves to

illustrate the extreme position usually foisted upon the rationalist. By taking up that extreme position, however, they have opened up and defined a middle – or rather, quite different – ground for a different kind of rationalism to occupy. Because his views are distinguished from those global haters of pleasure,[53] Plato has given Socrates room to incorporate pleasure as well as structure into the well-lived human life.

XIII. Mixing Pleasures

There is, however, an important lesson to be learned from the inverse-hedonist's suspicion of that which conventionally passes for pleasure – that which, on Socrates's definition too, counts as pleasant. By following his thinking, we might discover, and more carefully and truly diagnose, whatever it was that made him so hostile to pleasure.[54] It is important to remember, though, that in doing so we are following the thought of someone who has come to quite wrong-headed views about what pleasure is, and about what kind of thing the good is – so we should be suspicious of the route which leads to his conclusions, even if understanding why he draws the conclusions he does is useful in coming to a full appreciation of the complexity of the phenomenon of pleasure.

Because of the similarities in the structure of thought between the hedonist and the harsh haters of pleasure, diagnosing just where these latter go wrong in their reasoning may reveal similar mistaken turns in the hedonist argument. It is according to *their* reasoning that,

> If we wanted to know the nature of any character, like that of hardness, [we would] get a better understanding if we looked at the hardest kinds of things rather than at what has a low degree of hardness. (44d10-e3)

We already know how Socrates recommends looking for the nature of a thing, and it is not in extremes.[55] His preferred method, a gift of the gods, looks to the ordered plurality

within any unity, insisting that knowing the measure and relations of all these to each other is the only thing that will give us knowledge of anything.[56] We also know that the issue of the 'nature' of things that permit of extremes is a sticky affair – in themselves, they are indefinite.[57] According to Socrates' earlier methodological comments, the nature of 'hardness' – insofar as it has one at all – is something to be understood in terms of its opposite, and understood *as* something that does not acquire a determinate nature until it occurs in (and is understood in terms of) some complex unity.[58] It is these complex unities which have a fully determinate nature, in virtue of which something like 'hardness' acquires complete sense and definition. The inverse-hedonist wants to get more than one really can out of looking directly and exclusively at something which by its nature does not permit of definition; and perhaps this is why he mistakenly supposes he can do this by finding the most extreme examples. If we follow Socrates, the most extreme cases should be those that contrast most sharply with their opposite; but this is not where the severe pleasure-hater turns his attention when coming to examine extreme pleasures. Instead of looking to those which are least like pain (as with hardness he would look to those cases which were least like softness), the anti-hedonist suddenly imports a different notion of 'degree', quite unlike the one which had been at work in the intuitive appeal of the example from hardness. In the case of pleasure 'we ought not to look at low-level pleasures, but at those that are said to be the strongest and most intensive' (45a1-2).

Does the inverse-hedonist accept the Socratic definition of pleasure and pain as opposites? I think he has to. Perhaps the stern thinkers have not noticed that 'high degree of hardness' just means 'little or no degree of softness'; but even leaving pain out of it, the analogous claim about pleasure would have to be that 'high degree of pleasure' just means 'little or no degree of not-pleasure' – which is, of course, their settled doctrine

as presented in the first place (44b2).[59]

Once we have followed our dour leaders to the topic of 'intense' pleasures, we are able to shed some light on a further characteristic of pleasure, and a further way in which hedonism must be incoherent. Whatever 'intense' means, it does not mean 'most truly and exactly pleasure'; it seems, though, *somehow* to mean 'extremely or most pleasant', and thus to offer more of whatever it is the hedonist was trying to maximise. The trouble is, intense pleasures are bought at a very high hedonic price. As Socrates points out,

> Are not those pleasures overwhelming which are also preceded by the greatest desires? . . . And when people suffer from fever or any such disease, aren't they more subject to thirst, chill, and whatever else continues to affect them through the body? Do they not feel greater deprivations, and also greater pleasures after their replenishment? (45b4-10)

Protarchus agrees emphatically. He would otherwise risk ending up like his inverse-hedonist adversary-friends, who redefine pleasure into painless non-existence. If these are *not* the most intense pleasures – those, namely, which involve the greatest and swiftest change of state – then how are we to understand 'intensity' of pleasure?

Nevertheless, this is where the inverse-hedonist gets the wedge in. For his claim is that these intense pleasures have as much pain in them as pleasure, and cannot happen without this admixture of pain. In the case of bodily pleasures, also presented as the most extreme pleasures, people

> go from one extreme to the other in their distress – they sometimes procure enormous pleasures. But sometimes this leads to a state inside that is opposite to that outside, with a mixture of pains and pleasures, whichever way the balance may turn. . .so that pains arise besides the pleasures. (46e3-47a2)

This inference relies on the tacit assumption that all pleasures are similar to one another in this respect – a consequence of the assumption that looking at the most extreme cases will reveal the true nature of pleasure. He then claims further that since these intense pleasures are paradigmatically pleasure, *all* pleasures must be, in fact, mixtures of pleasure and pain in the same way, whether or not we notice it in the less intense cases. Socrates has already indicated that he will not follow the argument this far himself (44d).

All the same, seeing the obvious cases in which pleasure is only to be had provided there is pain – and correlating the amount of pleasure to the amount of pain – prepares us for seeing the very many ways in which pleasure is almost always a mixed phenomenon. Having distinguished early on between the two different kinds of pleasures – those of the body and those of the soul (32a-d) – Socrates sets out a schematic account of how pleasure and pain can arise mixed with one another.

> There are mixtures that have their origin in the body and are confined to the body; then, there are mixtures found in the soul, and they are confined to the soul. But then we will also find mixtures of pleasures and pains in both soul and body, and at one time the combination of both will be called pleasure; at other times it will be called pain. (46b7-c4)

The first to be dealt with are the pleasures in which the body is divided against itself. While it could be said even of the natural pleasure of eating that it only arises when the body experiences simultaneously the lack of food and the refilling with food, Socrates draws special attention to the unnecessary and extreme pleasures in this category. Ironically or not, Socrates takes care to say that he is not imputing such perverse enjoyments to Philebus (46b1).[60] The very mention of the incorrigible hedonist, however, serves as a reminder that, whatever Philebus' personal tastes, the simple hedonist of mindless pleasures is committed to endorsing as good even the crassest of

pleasures – he must even, perhaps, find a life of such pleasures one of supreme value, provided the pleasure is constant and intense enough. And the non-allusion to Philebus makes the choice laid before Protarchus particularly acute: either embrace all pleasures, or repudiate all pain. If both of these are unappealing, there is the third option of taking up Socrates' conceptions of *psyche* and value, and therewith embracing the full force of the methodology, epistemology and metaphysics which ground these views.

The kind of mixed pleasure listed last is addressed next, and rapidly dealt with:

> But take now the cases where the soul's contributions are opposed to the body's: When there is pain over and against pleasures, or pleasure against pain, both are finally joined in a mixed state. We have talked about them earlier and agreed that in these cases it is the deprivation that gives rise to the desire for replenishment, and while the expectation is pleasant, the deprivation itself is painful. When we discussed this we did not make any special mention, as we do now, of the fact that, in the vast number of cases where the soul and body are not in agreement, the final result is a single mixture that combines pleasure and pain. (47c3-d3)

Desire had already been defined implicitly as a mixture of pleasure and pain; now this implication is spelled out. The soul is in a state of hoping, the body is experiencing a lack. All hope for future improvement, however, can only be had at the expense of the awareness of a current deprivation. By now, the mixed pleasures, never explicitly called *false*,[61] are beginning to pervade everyday life and ordinary pleasures in an alarming way – alarming, that is, if you are a hedonist or even an inverse-hedonist. For if pleasure, by and large, can only be had on the condition of pain, then it is becoming unclear what it could mean to set pleasure as the source of value, the aim and justification of a human life. Or rather – it is becoming entirely too clear what it would mean. Either, taking pain

to be the opposite of pleasure, and hence evil, we are driven into the pleasure-haters' camp, in an effort to avoid pain at all costs; or else, we adopt the simple hedonist's policy of accepting pleasure at all costs, not counting the pain incurred as evil or even in the least objectionable. If pain is the only condition under which pleasure arises, then the simple-minded hedonist must actually advocate seeking pain, as a means to enhancing pleasure. While it is clear that pleasure would still be the source of the value of any pain incurred *en route*, it is not clear that such a life would be very *pleasant*.

But in these respects, the situation for the hedonist is yet more dire. For it is not just bodily pleasures natural and unnatural, and not just desires on top of these, which prove upon inspection to be compounds of pleasure and pain. In elaborating on the sorts of mixed pleasures which belong to the soul alone, Socrates sets out to show that 'wrath, fear, longing, lamentations, love, jealousy, malice, and other things like that' (47e1-2) are mixtures of pleasure and pain.[62] In case we supposed that, in spite of love's appearance on the list, 'other things like that' could include only negative emotions, Socrates deliberately chooses laughter and comedy to demonstrate the general point. Supposing this to be the most difficult case to prove, Socrates concludes his exposition by asking Protarchus,

> what precisely do you think was the purpose for which I pointed out to you this mixture in comedy? Don't you see that it was designed to make it easier to persuade you that there is such a mixture in fear and love and other cases? (50c10-d2)

But discovering that emotions, which pervade our lives, are mixtures of pleasure and pain does not just create an even stickier situation for the hedonist. It also provides a model of pleasure which the rationalist can not only endorse, but actually use to his advantage in pursuing the claims of reason as the arbiter of good and ill in life. For if

emotions generally all fit the same generic description – if they are all compounds of pleasure and pain within the soul – then they must each be individuated from one another as what they are by the various judgements, perceptions, memories, desires, evaluations, hopes and fears (that is, the cognitive content) that go into them. Even the rich emotional life, full of sensations though it may be, is cognitive all the way down.[63] We do not come to a point where we have emotions that are unconditioned by the fact that they are had by creatures such as we are, minded, with memories, anticipations, etc.[64]

For the Socratic anti-hedonist position, this will not be as troubling a situation as it is for the hedonist or his mirror image, the inverse-hedonist. For anyone, however, who makes a project of accumulating pleasure or avoiding pain, the mixed character of pleasure and pain in most recognisable occurrences will have awkward or else intolerable consequences. For the inverse-hedonist, trying to minimise pain, the result is merely awkward, for he must now insist that the best life, the only good one to strive for, is a life that no one could actually want – he must eliminate from the ideal life any trace of charm, delight, or even natural enjoyment; only then will pain be sure to be at its lowest. For the hedonist, of course, if it *were* true that all pleasures were mixed with pain, he would find that he had thought he had been making sense where he had not been doing so. He had thought that he was advocating pursuing pleasure, and not pain; and now it turns out that in fact what he was recommending was a life spent in pursuit of pleasure and pain.

For Socrates, pleasure is not inherently and as such the bearer of value, and so neither will pain, just taken by itself, necessarily imply disvalue. Whether or not either, or complexes of the two, are to be embraced or rejected in each case will depend upon the further story to be told.[65] This realisation is vital to the possibility of a humane rationalism in our approach to the good life. For if emotions are constituted of pleasure

and pain, then mixed pleasures pervade our mental lives, and do not just impinge upon it. And if this is an appropriate characterisation of the emotions, then pleasure and pain do not just constitute things which might make life worth living; they also condition the possibility of our finding things valuable at all.[66]

It may be no accident, then, that Socrates does not advertise the 'falsity' of these last pleasures, which include in any case pretty much all of the pleasures that had been described before. The sense in which they are false is certainly different. Most pleasures are not truly pleasures in the way that sensible objects in the middle dialogues did not truly instantiate their properties – they are not just what they are, but are also something else, namely their opposite, besides. This kind of falsity has to do with purity, rather than deceit or error. Thus the only space left for true pleasures will their purity, in being untainted by their opposite. In this demand for purity the enemies of Philebus were on the right track – but their mistaken theories about the nature of pleasure and about proper method (and so the nature of complex unity), led them to look for it in the wrong place.

XIV. The Arguments from Absurdity

Socrates concludes his discussion of pleasures with two final arguments against hedonism which solicit Protarchus' support in finding the necessary consequences of hedonism absurd. The first argument is a replay of the *Gorgias* argument about the leaky pitchers (*Gorg.* 493a-494e), according to which the most pleased man (happiest, on the hedonist's view) is also the most pained. The second argument recalls *Gorgias* 495c-499b,[67] and ends by pushing all hedonism into the swamp of Phileban hedonism. Both arguments together take up less than a page, and it seems Plato cannot have expected them to carry much weight in doing the work of persuading the hedonist. Rather, once one has let go of the hedonist perspective, one can appreciate the absurdity of the

consequences to which the hedonist must be committed. The fact that the committed hedonist could not recognise the absurdity is perhaps just another mark against him, from the rationalist perspective.

The 'subtle thinkers' (53c7)[68] who hold that 'there is always only generation of pleasure and that has no being whatsoever' (54d6, reiterating 53c6) will, according to Socrates 'just laugh at those who claim pleasure is good' (54d7). Protarchus has just agreed that if pleasure is a *genesis*, then it would be a basic category error to put it in the class of the good (54d3). This hardly occasioned any fits of mirth. What is particularly ridiculous are

> those who cure their hunger and thirst or anything else that is cured by processes of generation. They take delight in generation as a pleasure and proclaim that they would not want to live if they were not subject to hunger and thirst and if they could not experience all the other things one might want to mention in connection with such conditions. (54e4-9)

Aside from the unseemly behaviour that such devotees of pleasure might get up to, this open embracing of the dependent nature of pleasure means that one wittingly welcomes the destructions and depletions that are the necessary condition for pleasure. To strive for as many or as much restoration(s) as possible in a life, will commit one also to striving for as many destructions – that is, the opposite of what the hedonist would call good – as possible, in order to make available as much pleasure as possible. Now, if one is a strict pleasure maximiser and is just not that fussed about pain or anything else, it is open to the hedonist to embrace this conclusion – as for example, Callicles does (*Gorg.* 494b), and as presumably Philebus does as well. And it is still open to the hedonist to deny that pleasure and pain are in fact opposites, although we might then well wonder just what he would have to say about pain. At any rate, this indiscriminate attachment to pleasure

does still amount to seeking pain as much as pleasure, and so setting widely divergent – if not quite mutually exclusive – aims in life.

The second absurdity takes up where this one leaves off, and has been latent in the arguments against the hedonist from the early passage in which the life of pleasure is likened to the life of a mollusc. Is it not absurd, Socrates asks,

> that there should be nothing good or noble in bodies or anywhere else except in the soul, but in the soul pleasure should be the only good thing, so that courage or moderation or reason or any of the other goods belonging to the soul would be neither good nor noble? In addition, we would have to call the person who experiences not pleasure but pain *bad* while he is in pain, even if he were the best of all men. By contrast, we would have to say of whoever is pleased that the greater his pleasure whenever his is pleased, the more he excels in virtue! (55b1-c1)

Let us suppose that the hedonist, having seen that enlightened hedonism cannot be sustained (without transmuting into a variety of rationalism), perversely endorses unreflective pleasure-maximising. It is one thing to resort to name-calling, and make snide remarks about his mollusc-life. More articulate expression of that same objection, however, might be found by exploring what the implications of 'not having a human life' are. What could such a claim mean? and how could a human being ever *fail* to have a human life?

Bernard Williams,[69] for example, has objected to both utilitarian and deontological accounts of ethics, on the grounds that each of them gets so caught up in counting overall usefulness or else in universalising maxims that the person – with whom, or on whose behalf ethical thinking ever began – gets lost. The deontologist, following Kant and placing value in 'the good will' may have some rejoinder; except

that on most accounts, the 'good will' is so depersonalised – and necessarily so, in order to universalise in an unbiased way – that the good will, whatever it is, bears scarcely any relation to anything that we might recognise as, for example, a good *man.* [70] The utilitarian or consequentialist, however, is even worse off. There is nothing he can appeal to in accounts of goodness except further results or consequences. Even if he took 'maximising good persons' as his aim, he would have no way of characterising this good person, except as an efficient way of bringing about good results. So long as he is maximising good states of affairs, a man is good; when his maximising work comes to an end, so too does his goodness. There is no principle of unity holding persons together. And so there are, properly speaking no persons at all. And any life merely conceived in such a way, or even actually 'led' in such a way, would not be the life of a human being. For human beings, when healthy, have a unity and continuity within themselves at each moment and across moments – simply in virtue of the complex ways in which the cognitive capacities, which we clearly do have and exercise, work together. To have a 'mollusc life', or advocate it, is to strive so much as is possible for a person to sustain towards disintegration and fragmentation. One sets up as one's ideal to dissolve the person. But one can only set ideals, and pursue them on the condition that (and to the extent that) one is a largely integrated and relatively stable whole, or person. The hedonist makes it his project to destroy that which makes it possible for him to make a project of anything. Either he cannot think that the thing he is destroying is good, or else he cannot think that his destroying it is good. Yet he must do both, in order to maintain that pleasure is the good in life to be pursued and in virtue of which everything else acquires value, if it does so at all.

One might, with some considerable effort, succeed in so fragmenting one's life and experiences that one is left merely with a succession of moments, without any

comprehensible relation to one another. Perhaps Philebus' life is not flatly impossible – but it is not one desirable to all those capable of knowing it. Certainly sporadic and dissociated experience is not our natural and healthy way of experiencing the world. We might go so far as to wonder whether there could be a *world* experienced in this way.[71] It requires sustained effort in one direction over time in order to maintain this fragmentary non-life – in which case, the Phileban life of whimsical passions requires for its sustenance precisely that thing, the existence of which it must take to be contingent and irrelevant – namely, psychological continuity and connectedness over time.

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[1] E.g. *Gorgias*, *Republic* II, IX. In the *Protagoras* the arguments are in favour of reason, although not against hedonism, but as a corollary to it.

[2] This might be spelled out in terms of the nature of the dependency it has to conditions outside of itself – what are these conditions? and in what way, for what, are they necessary? Do they only *happen* to be necessary for the bringing about of pleasure? If it is significant that it be just *these* conditions which give rise to pleasure, and not just any others, then the conditions themselves will be significant – and not just because of the pleasure they make possible, but in their own right.

[3] If the hedonist is not going to be forced to admit that the mindless life could in principle be just as good as the pleasure-filled life which included reason and thought, then it will not be enough to claim that the pleasures of the mind offer a distinctive *variety* of pleasure – unless variety itself somehow is pleasant or increases pleasure. The pleasures of the mind will have to be somehow *more pleasant*, otherwise they might just as well (if only we could) be replaced by a machine that did the hard work of thinking out how to maximise pleasures for us, while we just sat back and enjoyed.

[4] Or, depending on how sceptical one wishes to be, for whatever reality value has.

[5] Of course, this could be denied on the basis of some conception of the overall good for a person, for a human life, and socially for human beings living together, but then it is no longer good results that are the measure of value, but good agents and ultimately the unity of goodness itself. Epicurus may be an interesting example of a hedonist who saw the need for an absolute conception of pleasure.

[6] This, I think, is broadly Irwin's [1995] approach to Plato's ethics.

[7] Views differ on whether Plato, or even his character Socrates, endorses the hedonist line Socrates brings forwards. Cf. D. Zeyl [1980]; Irwin [1995] 81-92; D. Frede [1992] n.11.

[8] The hedonist's Generic Theory of Pleasure, for example, comes as part of Socrates' defence: Pleasures and pains are 'not different in any other way than by pleasure and pain, for there is no other way that they could differ' (356b1-2).

[9] Cf. e.g. *Protagoras* 353e-354c, 356b-c

[10] Besides comparing the calculating mind to scales (356b2), it is just this role as pleasure-maximiser that allows knowledge always to prevail (357c).

[11] At least, the possibility of pleasure increasing boundlessly is supposed to explain its boundless value (27e).

[12] It is not, then, contra Gosling [1975] xi, that Plato was just *confused* about what the different hedonist positions might be.

[13] Or commercially, as *goods*

[14] Cf. N. Cooper [1968].

[15] Hence the pervasive use of the insidiously neutral term, *agent*, in much of contemporary ethics.

[16] Interestingly, the view that a life exclusively of pleasure and devoid of pain would be supremely desirable is taken for granted at *Protagoras* 355a4.

[17] 41b2-42c5, discussed in section XII below.

[18] It is interesting to compare this with a similar trial in *Republic IX*.

[19] Cf. Harte [1994]

[20] We might note that this life is humanly impossible in a different way from the way in which sustained perfection is a human impossibility. Striving for perfection enhances rather than undermines the conditions which would make a more perfect life possible. The self-defeating nature of simple hedonism will be addressed in section XIV.

[21] The hedonist cannot claim, however, that variety of pleasures is itself desirable. (See note 3.)

[22] The details of this elucidation have been addressed in Chapter 4.

[23] Chapter 4, section VI.

[24] Once he sees this, he will need to have it impressed upon him, as he unwittingly agreed at first, that these false pleasures are still pleasures and so should, if hedonism is correct be just as good as their true

brethren. The difficulties in the position that dismisses all false pleasures as 'not really pleasures at all' will be the concern of the discussion of the third kind of false pleasures, propounded by the inverse-hedonists.

[25] Chapter 4, section VII addressed mainly what the argument could mean to Socrates, and what its validity would imply about the relation between persons and their pleasures.

[26] Cf. D. Frede [1985]; Hampton [1987].

[27] A position, indeed, from which even 'endorsing' may not be possible.

[28] 54d-55d, discussed in section XIV below.

[29] Hunger, thirst, hope and fear are all discussed and related to memory, judgement and so forth before the question of comparing them to one another ever arises (31c-40e).

[30] Cf. D. Frede [1996]2.

[31] Discussed in Chapter 4, section VII.

[32] We might recall that the original task was to look for some *hexis* – a 'having' or possession – of the soul (11d4).

[33] See section XIV, below.

[34] Cf. Chapter 4.

[35] Cf. the discussion of relative measurement at *Politicus* 283 *ff.*

[36] Cf. Chapter 2.

[37] Cf. Chapter 4, section III.

[38] where difficulties in coming to a judgement arise when 'someone who cannot get a clear view because he is looking from a distance wants to make up his mind about what he sees' (38c4-6). For discussion of the process of judgement as the soul coming into dialogue with itself, see D. Frede [1989].

[39] Contra Gosling [1975] 218, who insists that this covers 'gloating anticipations only'.

[40] Cf. Chapter 4, section V. We might compare some of the points made by Williams [1959] about the relation between pointing (or noticing) and taking pleasure. (See esp. pp. 68, 71)

[41] And this explains, in part, why the good man has true pleasures. (Cf. 39e-40c).

[42] Stocker [1996] has much to contribute about the manifold ways in which pleasure and perceptions work, at least in some cases, necessarily together.

[43] That the alteration must be perceived will be made explicit at 43b-d.

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[44] Cf. *Theaetetus* 179e-180c

[45] 'Great changes cause pleasures and pains in us, while moderate or small ones engender neither of these two effects'

[46] Again 44b1: 'pain being an evil in human life'; and 'the most pleasant thing of all [is] to live one's whole life without pain' at 43d7-8.

[47] On the possible historical identity of these severe men of science, see Schofield [1971]

[48] 'Someone [who] say[s] that it is the most pleasant thing of all to life one's whole life without pain' (43d7-8), does 'really believe [he] experience[s] pleasure when [he is] not in pain. . .[He] believe[s] therefore that [he is] pleased at that time' (44a3-6).

[49] This, of course, also explicitly recalls the Trial of Lives, where a different set of three lives were set alongside each other. Although Protarchus is not now being asked to adjudicate between the painful, pleasant, and neutral lives, he is being asked to decide with whom he will cast his lot. (Cf. Hackforth [1945] 82, who suggests historical reasons for these two triads, and who points to Speusippus as the champion of the 'neutral life'.)

[50] Like the hedonist with his pleasure, the pleasure-hater has reduced himself to one rather inflexible criterion for evaluating; but painlessness as a criterion will not ever be able to provide structure in a life, relations between parts, subsidiary values that are anything beyond merely utilitarian – for the same reasons that pleasure is unhelpful in these respects.

[51] Protarchus at 12d and 13c5, the enemies of Philebus by implication when they say there is no such thing as pleasure at all (44b9-10), and that *everything* Philebus calls pleasure is to be considered equally as really just escape from pain (44c1-2).

[52] They are allies (44d7), although they judge falsely about pleasure (44a9).

[53] And Socrates again distances himself from this position at the conclusion of the discussion of mixed pleasures: 'I am not really in agreement with those who hold that all pleasures are merely release from pain' (51a2-3).

[54] 'Let us attach ourselves to them as to allies and follow their traces in the direction in which their dour arguments point us,' Socrates recommends (44d7-8). This is the same tactic Socrates used with the wise men endorsing conventional views about the order of the cosmos when classifying mind at 29a *ff.* (Cf. *summachos* 30d8, *summachous* 44d7).

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[55] Cf. Chapter 2, and Chapter 4, section IV.

[56] 16c5-18d3, discussed in Chapter 2.

[57] esp. 24a1-25a4, also discussed in Chapter 2.

[58] The earlier examples of hotter and colder (24a8), the fast and slow (26a3), etc., did not actually include hard and soft, but 'strongly' and 'gently'

[59] This dissonance between their conclusions and their method is noteworthy.

[60] 'I did not raise this question,' he insists, 'with the intention of alluding to Philebus'

[61] Cf. Hackforth [1945] 86.

[62] Cf. Chapter 4, section V (B).

[63] This was discussed in Chapter 4, esp. section V.

[64] This was why, as we saw in Chapter 4, the very nature of pleasure (31b-36b), including the specifically human pleasures (see also 47d-50d), required discussion of perception (33c-34a), memory (34a-c), judgement (38c-39c), and desire (34d-35d).

[65] This fuller story will come out in Chapter 7, esp. sections I to IV, where the mixing of the good life (59e-64b) is discussed. We set up for it with Socrates' reserved statement of intention: the hope is that 'it will become apparent as far as pleasure is concerned whether its whole class is to be welcomed. . . Pleasure and pain may turn out to share the predicament of hot and cold and other such things that are welcome at one point but unwelcome at another, because they are not good, but it happens that some of them do occasionally assume a beneficial nature' (32c8-d6).

[66] Cf. Chapter 7, section III.

[67] Where it is concluded that 'the bad man is both good and bad to the same degree as the good man, or is even better. . . if one holds that pleasant things are the same as good things' (499a14-b2).

[68] Like the 'enemies of Philebus', there is disagreement about who these clever men are meant to be, with most commentators declining to specify (Cf. Hackforth [1945], Taylor [1956], Gosling [1975], D. Frede [1993]). It is also not agreed whether Plato endorses their characterisation of pleasure as *genesis*. Hackforth [1945] claims that this cannot represent Plato's own view, while Taylor [1956] and Gosling [1975] hold that Plato partially endorses it – Gosling says (pg. 221) Plato takes these men, as the stern men of science (44b), as allies, although it is noteworthy that (unlike at 44d and at 30d) Plato does not say that this is what he is doing. According D. Frede [1993] the clever men articulate Plato's own view from the

Republic.

[69] Williams [1981]

[70] But see Korsgaard [1996] for a worthwhile attempt to address this by someone sensitive to the objection.

[71] If a world is distinct from, say, an environment, it is in virtue of the fact that a world creates space and reliability for continued projects, relationships and meaningfulness not ensured by just any sporadic circumstances which happen, momentarily, to obtain. Environments may undergo successive, radical changes; a world suffering such a fate simply disintegrates. We might think of the way that the person dissolves in parallel with the dissolution of stable reality in the arguments against relativism in the *Theaetetus* 159a-e, 166a-167a. A world is a ***world*** for a ***psyche***; a psyche is a ***psyche*** with, and within, a world. Cf. Burnyeat [1976].

Chapter 6

Purity & Truth

'But the power of dialectic would repudiate us if we put any other science ahead of her' (57e5-6).

Without the preceding arguments leading up to this conclusion in any obvious way, and towards the end of a dialogue in which expansive eulogies to the divine craft of dialectic have been conspicuously absent, this startling declaration from Socrates poses a challenge if we are reading the *Philebus* with concern rather for the unity of the dialogue than for the unity of Plato's thought across dialogues. When Socrates turns, in the preceding pages, to make good his promise to give pleasure and knowledge equal treatment, we have our last chance to get clear on just what Socrates' candidate is, and what kind of unity it has.

Knowledge has already been under consideration in the methodological-epistemological passage; mind was treated in the four-fold ontology and the classification of candidates that arose out of it. In fact, when we consider the prominent part played by memory and judgement in the discussion of pleasure, it may seem as if we have never *stopped* talking about Socrates' candidate. And it is no accident that it should seem this way. What we still lack, however, is some conception of how all of these strands and facets of mind, knowledge, judgement, belief, memory and so forth are to relate to, and elucidate, one another to constitute a well-formed whole.

There is much in the discussion of truth – from true pleasures (51a *ff.*) to the love of truth (58d) – that is difficult, and much that is perplexing. My primary aim in what follows will be to understand what it means for dialectic to be crowned the queen of the sciences,

and how this informs the rest of the discussion of truth and knowledge leading up to the coronation. I will begin with the treatment of true pleasures (51a-53c), and try to show how this informs the conception of truth at work in the subsequent analysis of knowledge (55c-59d).

I. Monads and mixtures, Purity and truth

In the *Philebus*, Plato offers us an elegantly interlocking epistemology and methodology, and an appropriate metaphysics to support it. According to the method handed down by the gods at 16b *ff.*, the way to go about knowing anything intelligible ('whatever is said to be' [16d1]; that is, any 'thing' at all) is to articulate its complexity. Any appropriate method of inquiry, if it is not to be mere puzzle mongering, will bring to light elements, parts of whatever kind, and their relations, and not just assert the unity or the plurality of the object under consideration. But if this is the right way of acquiring knowledge, then knowing will be knowing relations, right ratios of relevant elements or characteristics. Knowledge consists neither in intellectual intuition, nor in immediate perception, but in understanding the structural relations within and between things that make each thing a genuine unity, and make it the specific unity it is. But this, in turn, would only count as knowing because reality really is composed of complex wholes. Anything that is any *thing* has complexity in it of some kind or another. And according to the metaphysical picture drawn at 23c *ff.*, this complexity will be a measured – and hence measurable – sort of complexity. 'Everything that actually exists now in the universe' (23c3) – whatever is discernible as an existing entity – has appropriate and intelligible limits set on what would be in itself unlimited. Because these, the limit and the unlimited, exist together by nature,

the complexity and plurality of existing things does not threaten their unity; rather, it constitutes their unity.

In first drawing Protarchus' attention to the problems of plurality and unity, of 'one and many' at 12e, Socrates picks upon the examples of colour and shape. The plurality definitive of the unity of these two, shape and colour, should shake the hedonist from his faithful insistence that pleasure be spoken of only 'qua pleasure'. In order to speak intelligibly of pleasure, or of knowledge and intellect, the interlocutors will have to know the limits, varieties, relations and contexts in which each of their candidates comes to light, and becomes intelligible. When discussion moves to the 'solution' to the problems of the one and many, sound becomes the prominent example in the illustrations of the Divine Method – spoken sound and musical sound (17b-18d). Music later returns (26a) in the metaphysical discussion as one of the mixtures, one of the happy results of the appropriate combination of limit and unlimitedness.

It is striking, then, that it is to colour, sound and shape that Socrates turns in order to elucidate pure pleasures. It is agreed without argument or controversy that beauty gives rise to pure pleasures. It is not, however, just any beauty, but the beauty of certain colours, shapes and sounds that are the proper objects of pure pleasures. Unmixed pleasures are 'those that are related to so-called pure colours and to shapes and to most smells and sounds and in general all those that are based on imperceptible and painless lacks, while their fulfilments are perceptible and pleasant' (51b3-6). The esteemed status of these colours, shapes and sounds, however, rests not on their being complex or within complexes, but rather in their being simple, so that the beauty proper to them is not relative to anything – 'Those things, I take it,' Socrates tells Protarchus, 'are not beautiful in a relative sense, as

others are, but are by their very nature forever beautiful by themselves' (51c5-7).

Having worked himself round to the pleasures whose falsehood consists in their being mixed with pain, Socrates finds it fitting now to look at the unmixed pleasures (50e5-6).[1] And with his sceptical or puzzled question,[2] Protarchus is allowed to assimilate 'unmixed pleasures', to which Socrates refers, to 'true pleasures'. Socrates does not challenge the inference, but he treats it as a further claim. While the conclusion of the argument – namely, that these unmixed pleasures are true pleasures – and so the direction and purpose of this piece of the inquiry is thus brought up at the beginning, it is only after establishing the purity of certain pleasures that Socrates goes on, at 52d, to argue for their truth. Only after giving the circumstances and the objects from which pure pleasures might arise does Socrates point out that 'we have also to look into the following question about them. . .the question of their relation to truth' (52d4-6). In this way truth, in true pleasures, will not be simply whatever is left over once all the kinds of falsity, and the false pleasures, have been eliminated. There is a separate, independently specifiable notion of truth, appropriate to the discussion of pleasure – and of knowledge, as it will turn out.

It is in articulating the demands of purity that Socrates gives content to what is still only a vague (although much illustrated) intuition that truth is good. By giving substance to our notion of truth in the characterisation of purity, Plato is also able to offer more substantial reasons why truth does and should matter to us, and perhaps ultimately what the consequences and implications of a commitment to truth will be. It will be from his notion of purity that Socrates will draw out a conception of truth as absolute. Truth is not something that can be increased indefinitely or additively, by getting more of it. It is not the conjunction of all the 'truths', facts or true statements.[3] Instead, something becomes truer

by being more accurate, more precise – closer, that is, to the standard set by exact truth. Truth is thus normative, or aspirational. And it is this conception of truth that will act as the focal point, unifying Socrates' apparently plural candidate.

II. *Pleasure and Purity*

Through Protarchus' reformulation of 'unmixed pleasures' in terms of truth, Plato has announced his intentions for the conclusion of the discussion of pleasure. Immediately after Protarchus glosses 'unmixed' with 'true', Socrates responds by introducing purity into the discussion. True pleasures are taken in pure shapes and colours, and the pleasures proper to such objects will themselves be pure. But it is not just, as we might suppose, that the link between unmixed pleasures and truth lies in the pleasures' being unmixed with pain (and so pure merely in the sense of 'pure of pain'). Although 'purity' begins, here, it quickly becomes clear that pure pleasures are not just devoid of pain, but also of any ambiguity of any kind; and they will only be able to be pure in this way in virtue of the nature of the objects of the pleasure – it is pure objects of sense which will have a beauty, and so a pleasure, both simple and proper specifically to them and nothing else.[4] On the one hand, 'purity' will set certain requirements on the state of the soul in which a pure pleasure might arise (the soul must be suffering a painless lack of a well-defined kind); on the other hand, it will set requirements on the nature of the object. Thus we see at work what we learned about pleasure generally in Chapter 4 – pleasures are dependent upon their objects and context not merely causally, but in order to acquire any determinate character.

From the original description of physical pleasures and the circumstances in which they arise, it is no wonder that Protarchus is at a loss as to what pleasures ever could be

'true', in the sense of being unmixed with its opposite. If there are to be any unmixed pleasures at all, they cannot have any element of desire implicit in them, nor any other kind of awareness of a lack to be filled – or else it will be as much a pain as a pleasure. Yet a pleasure, if it is to be a true one and not a distorted version of pleasure or a misnomer, requires that there actually be some lack. A soul, and ensouled body, cannot already be in its most perfect state if pleasure is going to arise there.[5] So one of the conditions for the possibility of any pure pleasure arising will be that the soul be in a particular and peculiar state. Just how peculiar a state a soul must be in will become more clear when we consider the objects that the 'unfelt lack' must be a lack of. In order to arise at all it must be a lack of a particular sort of perfection, but one of which a person is unaware.[6]

The demand that pleasures be pure in this sense – devoid of any element of pain – in order truly to be pleasures is reminiscent of the troubles caused by the compresence of opposites in earlier dialogues, and the demand for utterly pure Forms that this led to. But the demand for a 'pure' experience here does not lead to a realm of Forms and the Beautiful Itself. Instead it leads to 'simples' of quite a different sort, although the demand for a lack of ambiguity becomes similarly generalised.

Lack of pain alone does not suffice to make a pleasure 'pure'. It *should* suffice, if all there were to being pure was being 'unmixed', and specifically 'unmixed with pain'. But on such a minimal conception of 'pure', Socrates would be forced to class as 'pure pleasure' even gluttony, since it is precisely in excessive eating and drinking that one no longer feels hunger before or during the meal. Gradually, as we come to see what might occasion a pure pleasure and why, the other sorts of falsity discussed are brought in implicitly, as points of contrast. Not only mixed pleasures were false – so, too, were the excessive and the

disproportionate pleasures in their way. And pure pleasures will also be those that are exactly suited to their objects (52c), and are not altered by contrast with one another (51c); and they will arise in relation to objects that cannot be false.[7] Against the background of a notion of pleasure according to which it makes sense to speak of them being proportionate or disproportionate, arises the notion of a particular pleasure being appropriate to a particular kind – size and character – of lack. And the character of the lack is determined by the nature of the object of which it is the lack. The peculiar unfelt lacks of the soul will have to be particular lacks of particular kinds of objects. Because the object is as it is, the lack of that object will acquire its determinate character. And only the soul capable of such lacks will also be capable of feeling pure pleasures. It is the nature and capacities of one's character as a whole that will make it possible (or otherwise) for certain imperfections to arise in the appropriate manner.

Part of what it will mean for a pleasure to be 'pure' will be that it is exactly and only pleasure. But a pure pleasure should not just be devoid of pain, but also devoid of any other characteristic which would colour or alter the nature of the experience itself as one of perceived alteration for the better. Because any experience – not just pleasure – is to be understood from whole to part, or 'top down', then any pleasure which is also something else (the gratification of a desire, the grasping of a principle, the prospect of a future pleasure) will have a character fundamentally altered by the association. Thus the beauty of the human figure or anything else recognisable as referring us to different contexts will not be able to give rise to a pure pleasure. For 'by the beauty of a shape,' Socrates clarifies, 'I do not mean what the many might presuppose, namely that of a living being or of a picture. What I mean, what the argument demands, is rather something straight or round and what is

constructed out of these with a compass, rule, and square, such as plane figures and solids' (51c1-5).

We might think here of Kant's 'pure disinterested pleasures' – and this would also serve as an illuminating point of comparison.[8] Plato shares with Kant the insistence that a pleasure, in order to be pure, must be free of all self-interest or inclination. And they agree that the pleasure cannot be dependent on the object of pleasure referring to anything beyond itself. In this respect, we might anachronistically consider them both likely to be friends of Abstract Expressionism. But Kant's primary aim in insisting upon the disinterestedness of aesthetic pleasure is focused on eliminating the interest one might take in the actual existence and possession of the thing represented.[9] 'Disinterest' is free from any desire to actually possess what is depicted, or any interest in the accuracy of the depiction. For Plato, it will be representation as such that interferes with the purity of pleasure.[10] On his account, not only the pleasure, but the object of pleasure itself cannot be dependent on its reference to anything beyond itself.[11] The objection to the human form as an object of pure pleasure is not that this form rather than that one might arouse my (but not your) personal interest or craving. Its being a representation of anything in particular means that it refers to something outside of itself *for its beauty* and quality. And this will not just be the case with pictorial representation, but with objects generally – Plato is concerned with the beauty 'of a living being or of a picture' (51c2).[12] It might be helpful here to attend to the parallel invited by this conflation, between the relation of depicted object to concrete particular, and that of concrete particular to the abstract object of which it is an instantiation. The point is a quite general one about the reference points of judgement – but it is brought out particularly clearly in cases of representational painting. It will be in virtue of its accuracy in the

depiction either of an actual person, or of some ideal human form that a picture of a human being will acquire whatever beauty it has. Likewise, it will be with reference to what it is to be some living being or another that the beauty of the form of a living body will come to be, and be assessed. And there is no other beauty proper to the form of a living body.

Abstract colours and shapes, by contrast, simply are what they are. Their only point of reference for their own trueness to form will be the shape or colour itself, what it is to be this shape, or this colour.[13] It is true that in order to *understand* a colour, or a musical note, as being *this* colour or sound that it is, we must understand colour or music as a whole, and the context in which colours and sounds become determinate, or become what they are.[14] But the pleasure that is the appreciation of the beauty proper to an object, although it does place demands on the overall state of one's soul, does not require that one actually understand the object as the thing that it is. The beauty proper to it will attach to it regardless, and in the case of perceptible things, will be perceived regardless.

As the beauty of a complex thing will itself be complex – bound up in the appropriate combination of opposites – so the beauty of simple things will be simple. And the pleasure that is the appreciation of beauty will be likewise affected – appreciating complex beauty will demand complex lacks, experiences and capacities. Appreciating simple beauty demands, by contrast, quite specific and uncomplicated lacks. The unity, hence the nature, and the beauty proper to complex things is constituted by its complexity, by the way opposing and mutually exclusive properties are integrated. The unity of the simplest perceptible objects, while defined as a place within a complex whole, does not get its own integrity from its peculiar way of conjoining opposites within itself. Instead, simple colours, sounds and shapes get their peculiar, definitive integrity from the fact that they

exclude all of their opposites. It is by having nothing in it of the circular or of the square (and so forth) that a triangle is a *triangle* (and nothing else). Many colours and shapes together – however pure each may be in isolation – will, like any complex object, get whatever beauty they have from each other, from the conjunction (that is, from their context according to laws of colours and notes and their relations and proportions). In such cases, the beauty would come to be in virtue of something besides the shape or colour itself.[15] If untainted fields of colour, and abstract geometric figures, are to be our paradigms of objects of pure pleasures, then it is not just pain that a pure pleasure must be free of. The object of a pure pleasure must be free of any ambiguity or dependence, so that the pleasure it occasions might be just this, and nothing else.

It is not just representational painting and programme music that Plato thus excludes from being a potential object of pure pleasure. Even the great works of Abstract Expressionism will mostly arouse mixed pleasures; although the beauty of a Rothko or a Mondrian will be much closer to Plato's strict constraints on purity than a de Kooning or a Kandinsky. As a theory of aesthetics, there is much that we might find dissatisfying in Plato's account of true pleasure and its objects.[16] But then, perhaps it is not a theory of aesthetics that Plato is offering, and perhaps we should not take purity as the criterion for comparing and ranking great works of art. It may be that aesthetic pleasure is always complex, and it acquires its distinctive virtues (if it has any) in some other way. What this account does do very well, however, is isolate and articulate what is involved in a conception of purity, by thinking through what it could mean for a sensation to be pure.

III. *Purity and Precision (Measure and Identity)*

Thus from unmixedness we come to a notion of purity as the quality of something being just exactly what it is, and nothing else.[17] While even complex objects will be 'exactly what they are', they will be so in virtue of a complex array of properties (contexts, qualifications) which are not the thing itself, and which – outside of the context of the unity of this particular complex whole – would be competing and contradictory. The simple objects of perception offer a kind of independence in their purity – for any of them to be 'just what it is' consists precisely in *not* being itself complex, but rather in its being *just here* and nowhere else within a complex unity. Latent within this conception of purity is the significance of precision, or accuracy and exactitude. And while these overtones will be no less significant when it comes to complex wholes, they show up especially clearly in the pure colours, sounds and shapes.[18]

At 52d, Socrates confirms that purity, glossed as the 'unadulterated and sufficient',[19] is closer to truth than 'the violent, multiform and enormous'. This should not be taken as offering an exhaustive dichotomy of all pleasures into pure and excessive. But the contrast of purity with 'violent, multiform and enormous' reiterates one aspect of purity critical to the argument. It is by reference to some notion of purity that it makes sense to think of anything being extreme and multiform. In pointing to the simplest objects of sense perception, it becomes clear that included in purity is a notion of an absolute standard against which to measure, and so also an implication of precision, and accuracy.

Taking up a specific instance of a pure colour – white – Socrates illustrates the relation between purity and precision. By linking precision, via unmixedness or purity, with truth, Plato paves the way for pointing out a similar way in which pleasures and knowledges differ from one another. The discussion of the appropriate way to evaluate the 'truth' of

whiteness in any instance also works as a preliminary argument for those sources of value which seem to appear so suddenly at the 'prize-giving' at the end of the dialogue.

> How can there be purity in the case of whiteness and what sort of thing is it? Is it the greatest quantity or amount, or is it rather the complete lack of any admixture, that is, where there is not the slightest part of any other kind contained in this colour? (53a4-7)

It is obvious to Protarchus that the latter case is more purely white. 'But shall we not also agree,' Socrates continues, 'that this is the truest and the most beautiful of all instances of white, rather than what is greatest in quantity or amount?' (53a9-b2). Both truth and beauty, that is, arise in cases of unmixedness, when something is precisely and unambiguously itself. The degree to which something is not implicated in its opposites is the measure of the degree to which this is a true instantiation of the thing in question.[20] While something can be more and less white, being 'whiter' (unlike being hotter) is not a matter of being whiter than white, but rather a matter of being almost but not quite white. White is precisely and (as in the case of other colours, shapes and sounds) simply defined, and acts as the standard for what it is to be truly white.[21] It is through this notion of truth as precision – precisely concerned with precise objects – that the discussion of truth in pleasure will lead to that of truth in knowledge.[22]

IV. *Knowledge and Purity*

Each of the two candidates is supposed to receive the same treatment at the hands of our two investigators, so that a fair comparison between the two can be made. 'Now,'

Socrates reminds us (55c3-7),

> let us not undertake to give pleasure every possible test, while going very lightly with reason and knowledge. Let us rather strike them valiantly all around, to see if there is some fault anywhere. So we'll learn what is by nature purest in them. And seeing this, we can use the truest parts of these, as well as of pleasure, to make our joint decision.

It seems somehow paradoxical to separate kinds of knowledge according to the criterion of 'truth' – after all, knowledge, unlike pleasure and judgement, cannot be false and still be knowledge.[23] But in the immediately preceding discussion, truth has just been recast in terms of purity – that is, unmixedness and accuracy and self-sufficiency (being exactly what it is). It is in light of 'what is by nature purest in them' that we will assess the comparative truth of various sorts of knowledge. And with respect to such criteria, different kinds of knowledge do indeed differ. By specifying the interest in truth through notions of purity, we will find Socrates' candidate is also liable to critical evaluation and inadequacy.

One of the reasons this is possible is that Plato seems to have relaxed somewhat the strict conception of knowledge familiar (or notorious) from other dialogues. He does not begin from the presumption that knowledge must be infallible – he is interested here more generally in different systems and methods for understanding and aiming to get things right. Thus the practical, liberal and fine arts all count as various kinds, or fields (or objects) of knowledge, and Socrates divides them first along these lines. Introducing at 55d1-2 a very broad distinction between the practical and the liberal arts,[24] he emphasises from the beginning the generous scope that 'knowledge' will have. Anything one could reasonably claim to teach or learn is granted some measure of grudging respect.[25]

But this more generous attitude towards what counts as knowledge should not deceive us. Plato has not given up the ideal of knowledge as something eternally infallible. Rather he is using the standard of perfect knowledge to organise and relate all the various disciplines, arts, skills, and sciences. Instead of contrasting perfect knowledge with true belief as two categorically different things, Plato here uses the distinctive features of knowledge in its strongest sense as a guide to measuring the relative purity of the different arts, and as a basis for the unity of kinds of knowledge and the various aspects of Socrates' original candidate.

To this end, Plato has Socrates point out that within the practice of a discipline, it is the precision, exactitude, and reliability that mark out its claims to knowledge; and it is the activities, skills, tools and objects responsible for lending these characteristics to any body of knowledge which are the measure of its purity as knowledge. 'If someone were to take away all counting, measuring, and weighing from the arts and crafts, the rest might be said to be worthless' (55e1-2). But although building 'owes its superior level of craftsmanship over other disciplines to its frequent use of measures and instruments, which give it high accuracy' (56b4-6), tools alone are not responsible for the accuracy possible within a discipline. A purer form of knowledge must have precise objects as well as accurate methods. Perhaps the art of navigation[26] could be improved significantly by introducing new and improved instruments for measuring; but if so, this will be due to the nature of its object. Some kinds of knowledge cannot be 'purified' because their objects cannot be known with more reliability and accuracy – whether by the introduction of improved devices for measuring, or by some other means. Some disciplines, perhaps in fact all of the practical arts, are intractably impure and imprecise, in virtue of the nature of their object.

The distinction between the theoretic, or pure, sciences and the applied sciences will be made explicitly later. The difference, as we shall see, between 'the arithmetic of the many' and the 'philosophers' arithmetic' is that the first is practised by

> those who compute sums of quite unequal units, such as two armies or two herds of cattle, regardless whether they are tiny or huge. But then there are the others who would not follow their example, unless it were guaranteed that none of those infinitely many units differed in the least from any of the others. (56d8-e4)

The difference between the two kinds of knowledge is not simply a difference in method, but also a difference in the objects of the science. It is because of the different sorts of objects which a kind of knowledge has as its concern that the method of knowing it varies accordingly. Thus, after using it to characterise a definite, well-articulated, complex whole, music is now re-introduced as the paradigm of inexact knowledge.

> In the case of flute-playing, the harmonies are found not by measurement but by the hit and miss of training, and quite generally music tries to find the measure by observing the vibrating strings. So there is a lot of imprecision mixed up in it and very little reliability. (56a3-7)

It is musical performance, rather than music theory, that is under scrutiny; and as the deliberate re-use of the old example implies, each of these has to do, in part, with quite a different sort of object.

The objection to knowledge in the field of musical performance, and to the other applied sciences, is that they are imprecise. And they are necessarily imprecise, due to the kind of knowledge they are, and not due to the circumstantial lack of sufficiently accurate tools for measuring. Then, as now, there are few tools to which one could introduce the

flautist in order to improve the consistency of his performance. Improvement requires mostly just practice and patience. But if knowledge is of how things really are, and if on account of the kind of object to be known the best one can do in certain fields is imprecise, this might seem to imply that objects themselves can somehow be imprecise. Does this mean that Plato thinks that all sensible objects are *vague*?[27] Are they, perhaps, in a way, not really objects at all?[28]

Music, like applied arithmetic, is 'imprecise' and 'unreliable' not because it is not most definitely this instance of flute-playing, or even because I am liable to make mistakes. The objection to music is that knowing what is to count as 'correct' from one instance of performance to the next is unpredictable. Because performance is thoroughly embedded in the innumerable contingencies of changing contexts, it is of the essence of music to be imprecise, in order to accommodate that contingency, to shift its measures according to unpredictable demands. If the weather gets warmer or dryer, or if the strings or the wood are of one kind rather than another, or if it is later rather than earlier in the performance, the exact requirements of how and what to play will change slightly. Music performance must be responsive to changes that cannot be anticipated or measured beforehand. In flute-playing, and applied mathematics, and so on, we inevitably reach a point in which our learning is no longer of stable, articulated truths. At that point, 'all we would have left would be conjecture and the training of our senses through experience and routine. We would have to rely on our ability to make the lucky guesses that many people call art, once it has acquired some proficiency through practice and hard work' (55e4-56a1). The problem with music is not that the musician invariably makes mistakes – so, too, do builders (allowed a 'superior level of craftsmanship'[56b4]) and mathematicians (even those of the

philosophical bent); and in each case experience diminishes the likelihood of error. Socrates described the Divine Method as almost impossible to use correctly, even though it was responsible for whatever knowledge anyone ever had. So the 'hit and miss' character and unreliability of the practical arts and applied sciences had better not just mean that people engaged in these activities are prone to error. Rather, in the case of the musician, the farmer, the doctor, it is precisely in learning to get it right that his craft begins to lose accuracy and predictability. It is just then, when he is going to perform well, that the exact placement of the fingers, the appropriate remedy and amount for this person now, and so forth will be unpredictable, and constantly changing. Thus the practical arts are radically context dependent in just the way whiteness is not.

In this way, the very 'failing' of the practical arts is also their saving grace. Practical arts cannot be 'pure', since by definition they are those arts that are responsive to the contexts and contingencies of everyday sensible and variable circumstance. But it is just this responsiveness, which is unavailable to the 'pure sciences', that supplies them with objects and tasks of their own – objects and tasks that have a necessary role in the good human life. Thus when it comes to mixing the good life, the pure sciences will not be sufficient – a person, to have a happy life, will also have to be able 'to recognise the human sphere and these our circles' (62a7-b1). If the pure sciences were just more exact than their practical counterparts, as the examples of geometry and arithmetic seem to imply, then knowledge of the 'philosophers' crafts' should enable one to know the imperfect sensible world (as well as it can be known) simply in virtue of this more precise knowledge. It is by knowing the perfect circle, or perfect justice, that I will be able to recognise this or that imperfect manifestation as an instance of a circle, or of justice. This, for example, might be

what one thinks is the project of the educated philosophers in the ideal Republic.[29] But in the *Philebus*, knowledge of perfect circles cannot do the job instead of more mundane skills. If the object of knowledge is flexible and changing, according to context, so too must be our way of knowing it.[30]

This may seem at first to undermine the epistemology outlined in the dialogue. After all, we were supposed to be able to know anything at all knowable by reference to eternally unchanging complex wholes. But the fact that mundane knowledge is of an object that is context dependent, *as* a context-dependent (and so capricious) object should not threaten the point about stable relations being the necessary point of reference of any knowledge. What will count for the musician as having got it right will still be a matter decided according to the perfect, precise and immutable ratios of the science of music as a whole. It will be by continued responsiveness to the demands of the situation in each case that a practical art will distinguish itself; but in each case, this responsiveness will require a firm grasp of the general and eternal standards by which correctness is measured.

V. *Victory of Dialectic*

Quite suddenly, Socrates declares (57e5-6), 'But the power of dialectic would repudiate us if we put any other science ahead of her.' Although the Divine Method outlined earlier was only once referred to as that by which dialectic was distinguished from eristic (17a), Socrates claims in the face of Protarchus' uncertainty, 'Clearly everybody would know what science I am referring to now!' (58a1). If this is not meant actually to refer to the Divine Method itself, it is likely at least that the two are related. For Socrates continues, 'I take it that anyone with any share in reason at all would consider the discipline

concerned with being and with what is really and forever in every way eternally self-same by far the truest of all kinds of knowledge' (58a2-4). The objects of the Divine Method were also supposed to be unchanging, and these abstract wholes were supposed to be 'forever in every way eternally self-same'.[31]

At any rate, we are not yet given any further considerations for preferring 'dialectic' to all other sciences. And when we *are* given further grounds, they offer no further specifications of the details of dialectical procedure. Unlike building, dialectic does not recommend itself on account of its plentiful and accurate measuring instruments.[32] Concerned purely with 'being', any talk of 'instruments' is out of place, and could only be meant metaphorically.[33] At first, then, dialectic seems to have won her position as queen of the sciences solely in virtue of her superior objects. The truest, and purest, of all kinds of knowledge will be that which has as its objects whatever is entirely always itself, irrespective of changing contexts.

It is in dialogue with Gorgias that the nature of dialectic, and the nature of its value, is further elaborated. There is perhaps much that is significant about the fact that we discover at this late point in the dialogue that Protarchus was once a student of Gorgias. Out of respect for his old teacher, he does not want to contradict Gorgias' claims about the superiority of rhetoric. It 'enslaves all the rest [of the arts], with their own consent, not by force, and is therefore by far the best of all the arts' (58a8-b2). This gives Socrates the opportunity to recall the point made about non-relative standards at the beginning of the discussion of truth. Deliberately invoking the language of 'true pleasures', Socrates insists that the measure of the highest of sciences

> was not what art or science excels all others by its grandeur, by its nobility, or by its

> usefulness to us. Our concern here was rather to find which one aims for clarity, precision, and the highest degree of truth, even if it is a minor discipline and our benefit small. (58c1-4).

Quantity is not the measure of quality, value or worth. Being free from ambiguity, reliable, precise, pure and unmixed, free from dependence on changing and unpredictable factors – these will be the measure of 'truth' and of value in both knowledge and pleasure.

Especially if we allow the Divine Method described earlier to be suggestive of what dialectic consists in, then this discipline will fairly earn its title as much by the beauty of its method as by the beauty of its objects. For dialectic, it seems, is able to combine the advantages of the pure sciences with those of the practical arts. Its objects are wholly context-independent, inasmuch as they remain entirely the same in all circumstances.[34] But its methods are entirely responsive to the peculiarities and particularity of each individual object. In fact, the method seems constituted by such sensitivity.[35] Rather than a set of axioms governing it, dialectic is held together as a single science by being simply 'by its nature a capacity in our soul to love the truth and do everything for its sake' (58d3-4). Dialectic is essentially an orientation towards truth as such, and for no other reason but that it is true. When the rarified objects of dialectic are described, it appears as if dialectic must be considered much more restricted even than the Divine Method.[36] But as a love for truth as such, dialectic will in fact be much broader than the extremely abstract considerations on higher metaphysics. Whatever activity we are engaged in, so far as we are governed in our activity and judgements by a desire for truth (at all costs, whatever the consequences) then we will be engaging in dialectic, even if about very mundane things.[37] Thus at the beginning of the dialogue, Protarchus and Socrates agreed to precisely this: 'we must do everything

possible to get through somehow to the truth about these matters' (11c9), and further 'we are not contending here out of love of victory. . .We ought to act together as allies in support of the truest one' (14b5-6). It was in the subordination of their personal interests to the interests of finding truth that discussion was able to progress beyond its original impasse, and discover anything true about the good in life for human beings.

So, as it should be in a dialogue that argues that the good life consists in ethical reflection – and reflection on value of a very particular sort – the dialogue itself is an instance of dialectic. But that this is indeed the good life recommended by the arguments of the *Philebus* is only about to come clear, as the various themes of the dialogue are finally woven together – twice.

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[1] 'It seems natural, somehow,' says Socrates, 'that we must proceed from the mixed pleasures to the discussion of unmixed ones.'

[2] 'But, Socrates, what are the kinds of pleasures that one could rightly regard as true?' (51b1-2)

[3] Hampton [1987] 255 puts it strongly: 'Ordinary matters of fact are not at the root of Plato's conception of truth at all. Instead, truth in the primary sense for Plato involves the accurate reflection of the proper order of reality. Although this ontological notion of truth may include beliefs about facts and values, it cannot be reduced to just individual beliefs of either kind.' Cf. also Vlastos [1965].

[4] As Gosling [1975] 142 rather unkindly puts it, 'Plato himself has (53b-c) a rather weird criterion for degrees of pleasure.' I hope in the context of the aims of the dialogue that some of this 'weirdness' has been dispelled. It should, in any case, be made clear that it is not degrees of pleasantness (if that means intensity) that is at issue, but rather ways in which something can be most truly *a pleasure*.

[5] Pleasure is defined in terms of the perfection towards which it is directed – which, again, explains why gods would feel no pleasure.

[6] Williams [1959] 70 points out that the difference between pure and mixed pleasures is that 'between those pleasures that consist in the satisfaction of a desire, and those that do not'. If, as is in minimally necessary on

the theory of pleasure presented in the *Philebus*, unmixed pleasures are not the satisfaction of a desire then the insistence that there can indeed be such pleasures is part of the refusal simply to redefine pleasure in terms of 'whatever sensation is welcomed/desired'.

[7] The beauty of simple sounds, shapes and colours cannot be propositionally false, as hopes and memories can; and the pleasures of learning are, by definition, concerned with truth (otherwise it would not be learning).

[8] Kant [1790], esp. 'Analytic of the Beautiful'.

[9] e.g. Kant [1790] 'Analytic of the Beautiful', First moment, § 2.

[10] It may look as if the difference is just that Kant thought one could, while Plato thought one could not, abstract the form of something from the thing of which it is the form, and still take pleasure in just that. I think this will not do – the human form (whatever that, abstracted entirely from our concept of human being, might be) is still for Plato, but not for Kant, objectionably complex.

[11] This is entirely in keeping with the line of thought I have been trying to bring out, according to which the relation between perception, conception, object and pleasure are not incidental or dissoluble.

[12] My thanks here to Verity Harte for calling my attention to this.

[13] Kant [1790] seems to share this view of what a pure colour *is*, but this seems not to do much to endear colour to him; nor is purity of shape his priority. (e.g. 'Analytic of the Beautiful', Third Moment)

[14] So much we have from the methodological passages. From the metaphysics of the four genera, we learn that the beauty of music arises from its particular, complex mixture of limit and unlimitedness. 'And does not the same happen in the case of the high and the low, the fast and the slow, which belong to the unlimited? Is it not the presence of these factors in them which forges a limit and thereby creates the different kinds of music in their perfection?' (26a2-5).

[15] Thus a Kandinsky would be no better a candidate for a pure pleasure than a Rembrandt self-portrait.

[16] Some of which is discussed in Janaway [1995] 68-71, 173-76.

[17] Thus J. M. Cooper [1977] says that, as Socrates uses it, purity is an ontological notion.

[18] Although Socrates also allows that the 'less divine tribe of pleasures connected with smells' (51e1-2) might be pure, he gives no examples or explanation. In the light of the characterisation of purity, it might be interesting to speculate about what could make the pleasures of smell less divine. Are they less accurate? More

likely to always be the smell *of* something or another?

[19] With Hackforth [1945] and D.Frede [1993], following Di s instead of Burnet (who has *itamon* where the MSS have *hikanon*).

[20] In this way the purity of simple objects merely provides a most graphic instance of what well-formed complexes also have.

[21] Cf. e.g. *Phaedo* 76d *ff.*; *Symposium* 211a-b; *Parmenides* 129d.

[22] Cf. Fine [1986] esp. 60-61

[23] The treatment of knowledge and belief in *Republic V*, and of the problem of error in the *Theaetetus* 187 *ff.*, show that Plato was well aware of this.

[24] 'Among the disciplines to do with knowledge, one part is productive, and the other concerned with education and nurture, right?'

[25] Even Gorgias' speciality, much maligned in the *Gorgias* and refused any status above mere flattery (cf. esp. *Gorgias* 464b-466a), is here treated as a sort of knowledge. Perhaps with no small amount of irony, Socrates grants Protarchus that, in ranking knowledges, 'you can avoid making an enemy of Gorgias so long as you let his art win as far as the actual profit for human life is concerned' (58c4-6).

[26] Navigation, along with music, medicine, agriculture and strategy, falls among the least pure knowledges: 'There is a lot of imprecision mixed up in it and very little reliability' (56a6-7).

[27] Cf. Sainsbury [1994].

[28] This conclusion would fit well with a common view of Plato as himself a flux-theorist about the sensible world. Cf. Bolton [1975]; Cherniss [1965]. Against this, see Owen [1965]; Irwin, [1977].

[29] Cf. Fine [1989]

[30] My knowledge of the road to Larissa must include the awareness that this road is the kind of thing, and so knowledge of it also of the sort, that might be undermined by the next flood.

[31] For a nice discussion of how dialectic here relates to the Divine Method introduced earlier, see D. Frede [1993], lxii-lxvii.

[32] Thus Gosling [1975] finds there are two principles of grading kinds of knowledge, 'one according to the method employed, the other according to the subject-matter studied' (222). I am not certain that these can be

very easily divorced from one another.

[33] Indeed, it seems better to conceive of dialectic as itself an instrument, rather than as a discipline making use of instruments.

[34] Or would 'from all points of view', 'all things considered' be a better way of thinking about it? Surely, the notion of changing circumstances is inappropriate – there are only different aspects we might consider at any given time.

[35] Cf. Hampton [1990] 27

[36] Thus D. Frede [1993] 70 n. 1, suggests that Plato 'might have in mind here an even higher employment (strictly limited to philosophers), or he might be indicating that the method when properly employed deals with unchageable being'.

[37] Cf. *Politicus* 294a *ff.*

Chapter 7

The Good and its Kin

I. Riddling Endings

Plato saved the biggest riddle of the *Philebus* for last. And, what is most puzzling, there are suddenly two distinct riddles. First, being satisfied that pleasure and knowledge have been adequately characterised, Socrates turns deliberately to the task stated at the original aim of the dialogue.

> Philebus says that pleasure is the right aim for all living beings and that all should try to strive for it, that it is at the same time the good for all things, so that good and pleasant are but two names that really belong to what is by nature one and the same. Socrates, by contrast, affirms that these are not one and the same thing but two, just as they are two in name, that the good and the pleasant have a different nature, and that intelligence has a greater share in the good than pleasure. (60a5-b4)

In his restatement of the competing positions, Socrates supplements the original formulations in accordance with the way the claims have become disambiguated through the course of the discussion. It is of course no surprise to find the mixed life hailed as superior to either of the other two candidates for the good in human life. As Socrates reminds us (61b3-5), to Protarchus' annoyance (60e9-10), this had been decided long ago. But since we were now supposed to be looking to hand out second prize, it is not obvious why the mixed life should be suddenly reintroduced into the discussion. Socrates' excuse is that 'the good must be taken up precisely or at least in outline, so that, as we said before, we know to whom we will give the second prize' (61a4-5). How mixing a life properly constitutes 'taking up the good precisely or at least in outline', and

how this portrait of a good life relates to the second-prize winner bring, I shall argue, unity to the dialogue, and thereby clarity to the kind of rationalism in ethics that Socrates has been advocating.

The second riddle arises when Socrates finally addresses himself directly to the question of second prize. Taking stock of their current situation (64c1-3),[1] Socrates announces the new task at hand. We are now going to find 'what ingredient in the mixture [we ought] to regard as most valuable and at the same time as the factor that makes it precious to all mankind' (64c5-6). It seems a simple enough question; yet it receives an unexpected five-fold answer. And in spite of the fact that nothing led us to expect this list of ordered prize-winners, Socrates makes no effort to explain, and Plato has Protarchus agreeing eagerly, as if it were all self-evident.

When we think back, as Plato invites us to do, to how we arrived at the first-prize winner, there was much that was odd about the whole process. Socrates now insists on taking us through this portion of the dialogue again, in some detail. He even insists on repeating the trial, so that 'if some mistake was made then, anyone now has the opportunity to take it up again and correct it' (60d4-5). But Socrates' invitation to throw open to everyone the role taken on by Protarchus in the Trial of Lives hardly removes the oddity. Moreover, beyond the general metaphysical points about 'wholes' – much of which the reader must in any case import from the four-fold ontology back into the conclusions of the first prize-giving – we were told very little indeed about what the mixed life actually consists in. So it should perhaps not be so surprising that Plato decided to revisit the topic. Unfortunately, about the specific *content* of a well-mixed life, we are only slightly wiser by the end of the passage. Although reasonably interesting for what is included and what excluded, we are still given only very general guidelines to the content of a happy life.

What we are given, though – and this will be the key to understanding how the first ending (mixing the good life at 59e-64b) informs the second (the prize-giving at 64c-67b) – is a detailed case-study in how to go about thinking about forming a well-mixed life. And this is where the significance of asking Protarchus what life *he* finds desirable, and later of throwing the discussion open to each person's judgement, becomes apparent. The authority of the judgement does not come from Plato, or from any of the sages, but from the person himself thinking it through for himself. It is this *process* of thinking well about how to be and how to lead a life, rather than any particular conclusions, that is itself the good for human beings. In this way, the asymmetry between the three candidates – the mixed life on the one hand and pleasure and intellect on the other – is resolved. It leaves us with no detailed analyses of the many virtues, nor with any particular activity (say, contemplation) specific to the best human life – instead it focuses on the on-going activity of mixing one's life well, that is, engaging in ethical reflection.

About how this is done, we are given clear and specific details, which follow from the broader metaphysical and methodological remarks earlier in the dialogue. And this is where the second of the two conclusions to the dialogue becomes especially pertinent. We were set, ostensibly, two different projects. The search for the second-prize winner was not to be the quest for an inferior, or second-rate version of the first-prize winner, but somehow for its explanation.[2] Now, when Socrates turns to handing out this second prize, we find ourselves with a set of interlocking principles, criteria, conditions and points of reference that work jointly to explain the goodness in a well-lived human life. They are arranged not only to explain each other, but to explain what it is for something to be valuable, how normativity is possible, and how these abstract conditions become integrated into happiness for human beings.[3]

II. The Philebus' Peculiar Good

The original task was to find some 'state or disposition of the soul' which would render life happy (11d4-5). Pleasure, even if it belongs to the class of changing state(s) of the soul, still is one of the soul's possessions, and so counts as a possible factor responsible for a life's being good. 'Knowing, understanding, and remembering' are equally states of the soul. By conceiving of the good for human beings in this way, we might well be looking for goodness as a commodity – as goods, rather than the good, and so as something one could try to maximise, whether this be done by maximising intensity, variety, quantity, or duration. The governing desire, and goal which makes sense of every other desire, would be to get as much as possible of this good – be it bits of pleasure or bits of knowledge. By contrast, it is not so obvious how 'the mixed life' too could rightly be considered a state or disposition in this same sense. A life, after all, would seem to consist in uncountably many such states, a person in innumerable dispositions. To make the well-mixed (well-ordered) life one's end is to set as one's ideal something that cannot be maximised. One cannot set about collecting up units of well-mixed life-ness – to suppose one could is to misunderstand what kind of thing a 'life' is.

Although the implications were not spelled out, the agreement that the mixed life was preferable to pleasure and knowledge had already been made when the various kinds of life first came up for inspection. 'There is this argument which has now indicated to us, just as it did at the beginning of our discussion, that we ought not to seek the good in the unmixed life but in the mixed one' (61b3-5). Socrates never goes quite so far as to say that the mixed life *is* the good for human beings.[4] The first time round, he calls it preferable to the other two candidate goods (22a5-6), sufficient and choiceworthy (22a9-

b1, by implication). He does not explicitly mention that it is perfect, or complete.[5] Now, at the end of the dialogue, Socrates again does not identify the mixed life with 'the good', but rather says that it is here that we ought to look for the good. 'Have we not discovered at least a road that leads towards the good?' he asks Protarchus. 'It's as if, when you are looking for somebody, you first find out where he actually lives. That would be a major step towards finding him' (61a7-b1). We might regret that this reserve allows Socrates to escape making definite and positive claims about the nature of the good. But in fact, the image of the mixed life as the 'road to the good' will turn out to be more suggestive than evasive.

With only this much said, however, there are very few constraints set on what might count as a 'mixed life'. Now Socrates begins the work of characterising the good life in more detail by observing that 'there is more hope that what we are looking for will show itself in a well-mixed life rather than in a poorly mixed one' (61b7-8). 'Mixture' is to be understood not merely as a conjunction, but as the appropriate blending together of the right parts in the right amount. The notion of mixture is being used normatively – but it acquires its normative overtones not simply in virtue of being a co-mingling of differing elements (for then any mixture would, just as such, be good), but in virtue of the fittingness of the relations between and measures of elements. This abstract point was brought out and supported in the four-fold ontology. Although it is implicit again in the distinction between the well-mixed and the poorly-mixed life, it will not become significant until later, when it is not the character of the good life, but the sources of its goodness, that are under discussion. For now, however, the task at hand remains that of illustrating the kind of mixed life which could rightly be considered a good life. In this regard, it is not just the ultimate content of the good life, schematically sketched, that is important; even more noteworthy are the methods that are employed for deciding the

question of what belongs, and what cannot belong, in a well-lived human life.

The aim in life, as far as our practical efforts are concerned, is to have a good one. This vacuous way of putting it is given flesh not by specifying which, of the things we might acquire, is good, but by elaborating which way of leading it would be a good one.[6] So far it has only been settled that the life mixed of pleasure and intellect is to be preferred (22a5-6). The activity of seeing to it that a life is an appropriate mixture of pleasure and mind is the ceaseless task around which a good life is organised. It is this which distinguishes us both from beasts and gods, and it is this by which there is *a life* for each of us to lead.[7] The good in human life is seeking to live a good life. To take the maintenance, or continual re-establishment, of the right relations between pleasure and intellect over the course of a lifetime as 'the good' is to make a certain way of living, and not some countable end-state, the thing which, when taken as a governing aim, makes a life a good one.[8] In this sense, then, turning up 'the mixed life' as the good life for human beings is indeed to discover the 'road to the good'. For human beings, walking the road towards the good is itself the good life, the good for us.[9]

III. Content

The ideal life depicted in the *Philebus* stands in stark contrast to that drawn in the *Republic*.[10] This is not so much because anything in the *Philebus'* account directly contradicts the regimen articulated in the *Republic*, but because the *Philebus* is much more agnostic, or generous, about the varieties of human lives that might be commendable.[11] When Socrates and Protarchus turn to mixing the good life, what turns out to be important is not that there be ten years of mathematics in the ideal life, but that there be some knowledge of higher things – unchanging and absolute – as well as some more mundane knowledge of 'the human sphere and these our circles' (62b1), in its

proper place in every life.

In similar spirit, although Socrates was earlier very careful to distinguish that small and austere sub-class of pleasures that could rightly be considered 'true' in every respect, it is not just these which find a place in a well-lived life. It is not even just these, plus the natural or necessary pleasures which might belong. Ultimately, *any* pleasure is acceptable in a good life, provided it does not interfere with the cultivation of knowledge and virtue. It may be uncertain just which pleasures are meant to be included among 'all those that commit themselves to virtue as to their deity and follow it around everywhere' (63e4-5); but they are contrasted with the pleasures to be excluded, 'those pleasures that are forever involved with foolishness and other kinds of vice' (63e6-7). Presumably, then, there is no objection to that broad class of trivial and miscellaneous pleasures that might come up in life, provided they prove no hindrance to the cultivation of virtue.[12] We shall see how this proviso is met when we look more closely at the method and reasons responsible for the mixture of a good life. In brief, the mixed and unnecessary pleasures become a hindrance to virtue when their value and place is not determined by an overall view to what is best. It is the overvaluation of pleasures, and not pleasure itself, which makes them a positive obstacle to living a good life.[13]

To this mixture of frivolous, mundane and exact knowledge with harmless and pure pleasures, truth is added at the last moment, almost as an afterthought. Claiming that 'the following is also necessary and without it not a single thing could come to be,' Socrates observes that 'wherever we do not mix in truth nothing could truly come to be nor remain in existence once it had come to be' (64a8-b3). This addition, which passes without further justification, seems at first strikingly gratuitous. Surely it was never a worry that the mixed life just described might or might not be *truly* good – and if it were, then certainly throwing truth in unceremoniously at the end would hardly address such a

worry. What, after all, is supposed to be added to the claim that this life is a good one by insisting that it is *truly* a good life? The mention of truth at this point is especially startling because, as Socrates has pointed out 'we made truth our criterion' (61e3). If this is so, how could it now be *added* to the mixture? Shouldn't it already be there?

But the addition of truth might have been introduced in just this peculiar way in order to confront the reader with this very presumption. If we suppose that the mixture must already have truth in it, this is because we are assuming that the truth of the elements and of the activity of mixing suffice to explain the appropriateness, unity and identity of the whole. But as we have learned in the discussions of methodology and metaphysics, truth, identity, and value do not flow from part to whole simply by the addition of parts to one another. Rather the whole has its own integrity, which cannot be built up out of, or reduced to, that of its elements. And it will be in virtue of the whole itself being true that it will be possible for the parts to be true or otherwise. The truth of the ingredients cannot confer truth on the mixture, and assembled 'parts' do not always constitute a whole. Truth no more than being can be derived from the 'bottom up' – the mixture itself must be a true one, and not just made of true elements, by true or appropriate means.

With the addition of truth to the whole, then, the mixture is finally complete. 'If there is anything else missing in our mixture,' Socrates offers, 'it is up to you and Philebus to say so' (64b5-6).[14] Protarchus has nothing to suggest, and provided we bear in mind the way that emotions were analysed as complexes of pleasure and pain, then the inclusion of the pleasures which attend upon virtue should satisfy us that the rich emotional commitments which also contribute to, and reveal, value in a human life have not been entirely overlooked. And if there is indeed nothing missing from the mixture, then it is both complete and desirable. By meeting the final criterion of the three

established (29d) in the Trial of Lives, when the mixed life first won out over the lives of pleasure and knowledge, the mixed life might now be firmly considered the good in human life, that which by its presence makes a person happy.

IV. Method

The mixed life thus presented may seem extremely indefinite, and not at all helpfully informative. So we are not to include excessive pleasures of debauchery and other vices – most of us hardly needed the intricate arguments of the *Philebus* to convince us of that. But while there is a large measure of openness regarding the variety of ways in which the stipulations outlined might be met, the indeterminacy is not so radical as all that. In fact, there are definite boundaries set on what kinds of things might be thought to fit the prescriptions outlined; but these limits are set not so much by stipulating the specific activities which it is best for 'all men' to engage in. Instead, the limits of acceptability are set by the very criteria and methods themselves, by which the well-mixed life first came to light as well-mixed. So if we are to begin to see why just this mixture, and not some other, is the most fitting one for a human life,[15] then we must pay close attention to the methods and criteria used to determine what does and does not belong in the well-balanced human life. As will be revealed, seeing this is partially constitutive of living a good life.

Beginning the elucidation of the well-mixed life, Socrates likens 'our situation to that of builders with ingredients or materials to use in construction' (59e1-2). This metaphor recalls the description of building at 56b, as the most superior of the productive crafts, in virtue of 'its frequent use of measures and instruments, which give it high accuracy.' Although the question of the good life for human beings is a practical one, and not a theoretical examination of timeless and necessary truths, still we will be

striving for the highest precision and accuracy which such a project permits. But this very concrete image might suggest inappropriately that we have got lots of pleasure-blocks and some intellect-beams which we must set alongside one another. The investigation into pleasure, which drew out how thoroughly cognitive pleasure is for us, should block this crude interpretation of the metaphor. Nonetheless, after the summary of the early part of the dialogue, Socrates changes to quite a different image: 'We stand like cup-bearers before the fountains – the fountain of pleasure, comparable to honey, and the sobering fountain of intelligence, free of wine, like sober, healthy water – and we have to see how to make a perfect mixture of the two' (61c4-7).

Truth is taken as the criterion for judging whether or not something belongs in the well-mixed life, and it is Protarchus' judgement which is responsible for deciding the matter.[16] As all of the knowledges, but only some of the pleasures, permitted more or less of truth or precision, the kinds of knowledge are the first up for consideration (61d10-e2).[17] The philosopher's arts are admitted without further ado, on the basis of their precision. But the remainder of the kinds of knowledge are not simply allowed a place in the good life as well, in virtue of the fact that none of them is, strictly speaking, *false*. In fact, they make it into the well-lived human life for quite other reasons.

The 'inexact and impure science of the false yardstick and circle' (42b6) and even the knowledge of music, which was 'said a little earlier [to be] full of lucky hits and imitation but lack purity' (62c2-3), are granted place in the good life not by default, or because they are 'true enough'. The inexact knowledges of the practical and fine arts are admitted in acknowledgement of the special needs of a peculiarly human life. The practical arts are 'necessarily' to be included, 'if any one of us ever wants to find his own way home' (62b8-9), while music must be included 'if in fact our life is supposed to be at least some sort of *life*' (62c4-5). It is not *just* because they are necessary for getting by

in everyday life, that these secondary kinds of knowledge are required in the good life in their own right. Nor is it because these lesser kinds of arts are crafts are necessary to us in order for us to become proficient in the theoretical sciences, or in order for reasoning first to get a foothold in our souls.[18] Music, at least, and the many skills and arts of culture generally, win their place in the good life because they give meaning to that life as a whole and as a human life.

As in the *Timaeus*, music may be able to do this because it enables us to reproduce in ourselves some of the real order that structures the cosmos. But if we think back to the objection to simple hedonism, this particular reason for including music, and culture generally, in the mixed life becomes particularly resonant. At 21c6-7, Socrates claims that without cognitive capacities of any sort 'you would not live a human life but the life of a mollusc or of one of those creatures in shells that live in the sea'. The danger of the hedonist position is that it ends by endorsing the mollusc-life. The corresponding danger in the rationalist position is that it ends up denying our humanity by recommending the divine life of pure rationality as the only *truly* good life, the one we ought aspire to and imitate, even if we never completely realise it. In response to this, it is the arts that are granted the unique power of making of a mixture a *life* – a life in a sense recognisable, and desirable, to us.

We might wonder what it is about the arts and skills associated with culture that they should be responsible for a mixture's being a *life*. The pleasant life devoid of mind was too fragmented to count as a life – it had neither internal coherence, nor continuity over time. The introduction of mind into the mixture should provide the integration and connectedness that would otherwise fail. The pleasureless life of reason, therefore, cannot fail to be a life on account of disconnectedness. On the contrary, it is – from the human point of view – entirely too connected, too uniform.[19] It fails to be a *life*, in the

sense of a human life and so in the sense in which the dialogue is interested, because it lacks the particular sort of complexity that would make a mixture of pleasure and knowledge in a soul distinctively human.

There are, then, two grounds for considering something an integral element in the well-mixed life. The first is that it reflects or embodies the true order of things; the second it that it responds to the particularly human situation. Something might belong in a well-mixed life either strictly in virtue of its own uncompromising truth, or else in virtue of its being a sort of aiming at truth which is necessary for human life, and necessary for making it *human*. While it is important to see these as two separate grounds, so that neither one overshadows and excludes the other, they are also not unrelated considerations. While absolute truth is the primary concern, because we are addressing ourselves to a practical and peculiarly human issue, the truth-about-human-beings must be allowed to play an integral role in ascertaining what is fitting and appropriate. What counts as being truthful, as aiming at truth, is established by an absolute notion of truth, having nothing in particular to do with human beings as such. In this way, this 'localised' truth-about-human-beings is still granted its authority in virtue of its relation to truth, generally and as such. Our 'second criterion' is really more a particular variant of our first, truth. But it makes its own demands, and places its own restrictions, on what could count as good order in a human life. The truth about human beings, about persons and lives, involves a particular field of understanding, which must not be left out of consideration. If pleasures, desires and emotions are going to be genuinely cognitive, then the areas of knowledge appropriate to a human life must include those that make it possible for moderate pleasures, temperate desires, sensible emotions to arise naturally as well-formed unities.

At this, the whole 'flood of all sorts of knowledge' (62c8) is allowed into the

well-mixed life – not as a necessary component of each good life, but as a possible element in any life. 'As long as we have those [knowledges] of the highest kind,' says Protarchus (62d2), none of the other kinds of knowledge could do any harm by appearing in a human life. It is not that various sorts of frivolous or trivial knowledge are simply innocuous – after all, they could perhaps act as much as an obstacle to leading a well-mixed life as any pleasure could; but these irrelevant sorts of knowledge become innocuous, in the life in which the higher sorts of knowledge are already present – and presumably already present in their proper, leading and governing, role.

Having decided the fate of reason, Socrates now turns to the pleasures, asking 'whether we ought to admit the whole tribe in their cases or whether we should at first admit the true ones only' (62e4-6). Just as with knowledges, the criteria of truth, and of necessity to human life – in that order – are used to admit the first two groups of pleasures. Protarchus agrees without further comment that these are involved in a well-ordered life.

But when it comes to determining whether the remainder of the pleasures are – like the remainder of skills and sciences – 'innocuous or even beneficial' (63a1), Socrates changes his strategy. In deciding whether to include non-necessary and less than true pleasures, or which of them to admit, Socrates says, 'we should not turn to ourselves with this question, Protarchus, but to the pleasures themselves, as well as to the different kinds of knowledge, and find out how they feel about each other' (63a6-8). Personifying the kinds of knowledge and the pleasures seems an odd way of going about deciding the matter, and it is not clear why Protarchus' own judgement – so trustworthy in the decision about the mixed life as best, and in discriminating knowledges – should suddenly no longer be satisfactory for deciding the issue.

Two important points come strikingly to the fore through this personification.

First of all, we discover that the pleasures are able to speak for themselves, on behalf of pleasure, in a way that Philebus is not. Not only has he repudiated discourse, and gradually faded away from active participation in the discussion, Philebus is directly addressed when the mixing of the good life is complete, and asked to give his objections or else his seal of approval (64b). He does neither. But it is not just the incorrigible hedonist that is inarticulate. If, as Socrates has just suggested, we recall the dream sequence (20b-23a), in which mindless pleasure was brought to trial along with charmless intellect, we will also recall the mindless hedonist's conception of pleasure. Very much in contrast to the pleasures who here defend themselves so ably, pleasure on Philebus' conception of it is utterly inarticulate. It can say nothing on its own behalf, because it cannot say anything at all. Or, to de-personify it, there is nothing to be said in favour of such pleasures, because it is impossible to say anything about them at all, except that they are pleasant. Besides being unattractive, such a conception of pleasure is unrealistic, and Plato has had Socrates argue for a more articulate, specifically varied conception of pleasure, one responsive to the reality of its context within a human *psyche* and life. It is the rationalist's conception of pleasure that is at least able to speak, to reason minimally about what at least is best for it. Pleasure therefore recognises that it is 'neither possible nor beneficial' for it to remain 'in isolation and unmixed' with intellect (63b7-c1). If there had previously been any doubt about the extent of Plato's claims regarding the pervasiveness of the cognitive, this should allay them. It is not only 'bad' for pleasure, but actually *impossible* for it to exist apart from believing, thinking, remembering, and so forth.

But this also brings out the second striking feature of the response the pleasures give. It is not just articulate – it is specifically a reasoned self-defence. Pleasure, that is, speaks in its own interests. Pleasure is concerned that the good life include whatever is

necessary for there to be pleasure – it is interested exclusively in itself and in self-preservation. Thus, pleasure considers the 'best kind of knowledge the kind that understands not only all other things but also each one of us, as far as that is possible' (63c2-3). And aside from this self-interest, pleasure is utterly undiscriminating, both about itself and about mind. It is noteworthy that it is 'the pleasures' who respond, and not Pleasure (goddess or otherwise). This emphasis on the plurality of pleasures reminds us of the complaint against the consequentialist core of hedonism – the hedonist conceives of good as goods, as atoms of fun that it would always be better to have more of. The pleasures, when they make any attempt to describe the value of anything else – in this case, of knowledge – can do so only by considering what will serve the pleasures themselves.

This prelude serves well to bring home the distinctive Platonic notion of reason at work in the sort of rationalism Socrates defends in the *Philebus*. Unlike pleasure, intellect and reason argue vehemently for their own good, not for their own sake, but for the sake of the good – of the goodness of the whole life and of the person leading that life.[20] The distinctive capacity of reason and intellect is to see what is good for the whole, all things considered, in light of what it is for anything to be good generally, as well as with a view to what it is for this person here to be faring well. It is true that reason is also interested, in a way, in self-preservation. The extreme pleasures, argue reason and intellect 'are a tremendous impediment to us, since they infect the souls in which they dwell with madness or even prevent our own development altogether. Furthermore, they totally destroy most of our offspring, since neglect leads to forgetfulness' (63d4-e2). But the objection is not just that immoderate pleasures destroy the fruits of the intellect; more importantly, in so doing, they destroy the very possibility of a well-mixed life (63e5-64a1).[21]

And the destruction does not stop there. Undoing the possibility of a stable, well-mixed life also undoes the very possibility of perceiving the good at all. Admitting the extreme pleasures into a mixed life is particularly foolish 'if [one] wants to discover in this mixture what the good is in man and in the universe and to get some vision of the nature of the good itself' (64a1-3). Reason has not just 'spoken reasonably and in accord with her own standards' (64a5-6); she has also spoken in accord with standards as such, with the demands of the possibility of any normativity whatsoever. And she has spoken on her own behalf not in order to increase the amount of knowledge in a life, but in order to make of a life a more perfect, well-integrated whole. If the rationalist wants to explain the value (or otherwise) of other aspects of life, it will not measure in proportion to the extent that reasoning is increased. Because the distinctive feature of reason and intellect is to be interested in the good as such, and (in various contexts) the good all things considered, they – unlike pleasure – are in a position to grant that even their supposed opponents, the pleasures, might well be good – not because they maximise knowledge, but simply because this kind of pleasure under these sorts of circumstances is a good one for this kind of living creature to have. The rationalist might allow that pleasures are constitutive of the good life – but which pleasures are so, and where and when they should arise in order to be so, is a matter for reason and intellect to discern.

On the basis of this, and under the premise that we were seeking the good in the well-mixed life, and not the poorly mixed one, the final determination of the character of the good life for human beings has presumably been left to reason. Adding the stamp of approval by the introduction of truth, without which it is impossible for anything to come to be or remain in existence, Socrates announces the conclusion of the first project, that of determining the character of the good life, and the ultimate aim of human activity and valuing. 'To me at least it seems that our discussion has arrived at the design of what

might be called an incorporeal order that rules harmoniously over a body possessed by a soul' (64b6-8).

V. Unity of Good, Multiplicity of Virtues

We might feel uncomfortable with Plato concluding the remarks on the character of the good life for human beings just here. After all, we have received very little practical advice in the end about which particular decisions to make, or which particular things ought be done in a good life. We have not even been given a list of desirable character traits we might properly aspire to. There is a mention of virtue – but this is just in passing at 63e, where the voice of reason generously allows that 'the pleasures of health and of temperance and all those that commit themselves to virtue as to their deity and follow it around everywhere' (64e3-5) may also be included in the well-mixed life. In a dialogue devoted to the topic of the good life for human beings, this passage contains the only explicit mention of virtue since Socrates' contention at the opening of the dialogue (12c-d), that the pleasures of the wise and temperate man differ from those of the foolish and debauched. We are not given any of the details of what virtue consists in, what the various virtues are – if, indeed, they are various – or what actions or attitudes are demanded or entailed by the virtues. This is, of course, very much in contrast to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, from which we would gather that the main business of moral philosophy would be a careful consideration of the specific nature of each of the virtues and their relations to each other, to vice and to conduct.

Rather than conclude that Plato simply lacked the time, space, or perhaps interest to deal with this theme in the *Philebus*,[22] we might take this silence seriously. An illuminating explanation of the absence of consideration of the many virtues might be seen when we look to the general method used in the *Philebus* as a whole. The

conception of ethics and of ethical thinking that is implicit, and the kinds of things we are invited to see as important to thinking about ethics involve attention to structure, unity and integrity, instead of focusing on the manifold virtues. If our attention is on the most general requirements of goodness, on what makes something a whole, and on what makes something what it is, we will have thereby a sense of what it is for something to be a 'virtue'. And with that we will have also grounds and points of reference for considering this or that worthy, good, virtuous, desirable. Thus we have been given criteria, methods and standards with which to make of our lives a project of on-going assessment, in the face of whatever possibilities and obstacles we should be confronted. It will be in light of this that any particular character trait, habit, action will or will not count under various circumstances as excellent or otherwise.[23] The plurality of virtues are only to be understood as virtues in light of the kind of unity goodness has. And this continuous process of trying to understand the unity of goodness and of persons is itself the good in a human life.[24]

So it is not as if Plato has left bits out, and could have written a sequel – say, *Philebus II*, or *Nichomachean Ethics* – in which he now filled in the gaps left in the account offered in the *Philebus* by moving on to the project of enumerating virtues. To suppose such a piece could or should be written is to miss the main point of the dialogue: namely, that the project of thinking through those issues for oneself, within the frame of reference outlined, is part of the on-going project constitutive of living, day to day, a good life.

And, as a part of this process of evaluation, we are given some grounds to do it this way, within the rationalist framework – to trust reason and intellect, in their overall grasp of the good life and value generally, to lead our evaluations of choiceworthiness, desirability and even pleasantness. We are given general metaphysical and

methodological grounds for conceiving of wholes as identity- and value-conferring, as standard-setting, as responsible for introducing normativity, and as necessary for even simple judgements. We are further given a way of considering a person, his life and his world as a unity in the relevant sense. We are, ideally, wholes within a whole, and as such (and by reference to this) we can begin to make our lives intelligible, begin to understand what it is for something to be intelligible, and see the significance of a distinctively human life being essentially intelligible. The intelligibility of a life comes on the one side from the norms of intelligibility themselves, and on the other side from the coherence of the person whose life it is. From the Trial of Lives – and in more detail in the discussion of false pleasures – we saw how the integrity of a person matters for the kind of life that will be possible for him. The fact that integrity can be this sort of normative thing for us is a consequence of the way that the complex soul incorporating reason becomes transformed into something pervasively cognitive.

VI. The Second Question: What is good about the good life?

If living a well-ordered life is the road to the good, then the 'incorporeal order that rules harmoniously over a body possessed by a soul' (64b7-8) – by which any mixed life can be evaluated as being well or poorly mixed – is the house on that road where the good resides (64c1-3).[25] Because the good is housed in the order of an embodied *soul*, this makes goodness and value firmly agent relative. Because, however, the goodness in the agent comes not just from his being an agent, but from some standard of good order not peculiar to him nor even to human beings, goodness is not something that any agent or group of agents merely decides, or invents, or otherwise determines idiosyncratically. How people do live is therefore never something inaccessible to wholesale critique. The well-ordered soul is the source of goodness in a human life, because it is that kind of soul

which can and does thoughtfully construct a life with a view to what is best on the whole.[26] But it is the order of the soul itself, and the order and balance which it takes as an ideal when shaping a life and a soul capable of living a well-balanced life, that confers goodness on the living soul.

In turning to look at the 'house' from which goodness issues, Socrates re-introduces the project begun after the failure of both pleasure and knowledge to win 'first prize'. He had just promised that taking up the mixed life itself should help us settle this second issue. Now, the rather convoluted description of what any 'second prize winner' might look like,[27] is restated more succinctly in two distinct questions. 'What ingredient in the mixture ought we to regard as most valuable and at the same time as the factor that makes it precious to all mankind?' Socrates asks as his first question. And 'once we have found it, we will inquire further whether it is more closely related and akin to pleasure or to reason, in nature as a whole' (64c5-8).

The ambiguity of the project begun at 22d is now finally resolved into two separate concerns. We are in the first place concerned to find that, whatever it is, which is responsible for the goodness in a good life – this, Socrates stipulates, is what we should regard as most valuable. And we are concerned secondarily to assess the merits of reason and of pleasure in the light of this.

We have already seen that a well-mixed life, governed and sustained by a well-ordered soul, is the good for human beings – that at which all human action should aim, and that by reference to which any human values or considerations acquire meaningfulness. What is it that makes this the good to aim at?[28] And once this first question is settled, a further question remains: What is it *within* the well-ordered life and soul that, by its familial resemblance to the good, makes one best able to create and maintain the good in life? 'Familial resemblance' should rather strengthen than weaken

the relation that is being asserted here.[29] The good for human beings and the element within the life being sought do not just resemble each other; they are not simply similar, but actually *related*, in some non-accidental way or another. They are of the same family. And it is from this strong conception of familial relations that the ground for settling the dispute between reason and pleasure is being laid. For if we are looking in the first question for the cause of the goodness of any well-mixed life, its closest kin will likely also belong (or in some way be closely related) to the category of cause.

As these two issues are finally pulled apart, we begin to see why we might have felt that the original project of seeking a second-prize winner was impossibly asking for two quite different sorts of things. For it would be natural to consider the *cause* or source of goodness in the good life to be something prior to, hence 'higher' than, the good life or the goodness in life itself. On the other hand, we were told that this was to be the search for *second* prize, second to the 'mixed life', and only *akin* to whatever made the good life good. Bestowing any second-prize that meets the description prescribed may well require two different prize-winners; for the candidate answering to the first description may well not answer to the second, and vice versa.

In discovering the well-mixed life to be the 'house of the good', Socrates and Protarchus trusted reason to indicate reliably which mixture would be for the best. So it would be possible, and would conform to a certain variation of rationalism, to contend that what made the mixture a good one was simply the fact that it was that mixture which was arrived at by reason. While this is not, as we shall see, strictly mistaken, it is also – for the view Plato wants to endorse – only part of the story. Reason could not just decide things any which way, and there are independent considerations which make just reason the thing which will hit upon the good mixture for a human life to have. It is these most general considerations of the kinds of things that reason looks for and is able to recognise

that grants it a place within a complex structure of explanation of value.[30] The mere fact that reason has worked out some view of what a well-ordered life looks like will not suffice to justify that view as one of the good life. It is instead the good order itself, the order which reason looks to and strives for that will explain the worth in a life.

Human lives and persons are not merely complicated – they are, or should be, complex wholes. And it is as a *mixture* that the most general explanation of value in life is to be found.

> Any kind of mixture that does not in some way or other possess measure or the nature of proportion will necessarily corrupt its ingredients and most of all itself. For there would be no blending in such cases at all but really an unconnected medley, the ruin of whatever happens to be contained in it. (64d8-e3)

It is not just an old Platonic prejudice for symmetry which turns up measure and proportion as the factors responsible for the goodness of any mixture. Having the appropriate measures and proportions, whatever these may be, is necessary if any mixed thing is going to be able to be the thing that it is (17c-d, 25e-26b). Take away *just these* relations of high and low, fast and slow, and you no longer have music, but a cacophony (26a) – 'an unconnected medley'. It was not just any conjunction of properties and measures that make a well-integrated whole. Mixtures are unities with reference to which anything without proper measure can become in any way determinately *something*. Take away just the proper measures of hot and cold, wet and dry, and you are no longer describing health (25e), but rather sickness, or else some random state bearing no relation to anything existing. Sickness, as sickness, does not have some particular measure or another. And it is, and is understood as being, anything at all, with reference to the health it fails to instantiate. Similarly, take away just the right measure of various pleasures and various kinds of knowledge and reasoning in a human life, and

like the mindless hedonist you no longer have a *life*, but a disconnected heap of free-floating 'states', meaningless because devoid of the context in which they could first appear as what they are. Or at best, like the sophisticated hedonist who can calculate long-term pleasures but not evaluate overall worth, you have a life whose goodness and sense can only be assessed when it is considered in its relation to the ideal which it fails to reach.

But proportion, used in the normative sense of 'due measure' (and not just a measurement of whatever ratios happen to hold), brings along with it truth and beauty, so that 'the force of the good has taken refuge in an alliance with the nature of the beautiful. For measure and proportion manifest themselves in all areas as beauty and virtue,'[31] and 'truth is also included along with them in our mixture' (64e6-7, 9). This conjunction of truth, proportion and beauty does not give us a definition of the elusive 'Form of the Good' – for that would require 'capturing the good in *one* form', which Socrates says we cannot do (65a1).[32]

These three criteria, and the use they are put to, will recall their predecessors – sufficiency, completeness and desirability from the Trial of Lives (20d *ff.*). But as we are now looking to award second prize – whose character, I have argued, is significantly different from that of the first prize winner – the process of assessment is no mere repetition of the first trial. When the task was to establish, or deny, the absolute goodness of our various candidates for the good in human life, it was enough to use necessary features of the good to include or exclude rivals for that name. Now the task at hand is to measure the relation of our remaining candidates to good-making qualities. The conjunction of beauty, proportion and truth 'should by right be treated as a unity and be held responsible for what is in the mixture, for its goodness is what makes the mixture itself a good one' (65a3-5). At issue now are sources of goodness. Thus, in the trial for

first prize, a candidate either was or was not sufficient and complete; in the race for second prize, our candidates may each have more or less in them of proportion, beauty and truth. This new trio comprises three aspects of the 'force of the good', three powers capable of conferring value or explaining it. Sufficiency, completeness and choiceworthiness were used as specific ways of delineating an absolute, rather than relative, notion of goodness, appropriate to the task of finding *the* good in life. Beauty, proportion and truth are used, in virtue of their relation to goodness, to explain the value of things in which they are found.

Having exchanged the characteristics of absolute goodness (sufficiency, perfection and desirability) for those of the power, or cause, of goodness, Protarchus is in a position now to repeat his old contest and the process of judging of pleasure and knowledge. But in picking out his criteria, Socrates has already answered the first part of the question motivating the search for a second-prize winner (64d8-e3). The question of the cause of goodness has been quietly resolved. The new contest between pleasure and intellect, then, can only be for the second part of second prize: the title of being 'more closely related to the supreme good and more valuable among gods and men' (65b1-2). Again pleasure, and then mind, are held up against the three aspects of goodness – this time not to see whether either is equivalent to some criterion of goodness, but rather to see how close each of them comes, or is related to, qualities of goodness capable of making good whatever is appropriately related to them. 'So now let us judge each one of the three in relation to pleasure and reason. For we have to see for which of those two we want to grant closer kinship to each of them' (65b4-6).

If we recognise the replay, and reworking, of the original competition recommended by Socrates' dream, one common complaint about the procedure can be dispelled. As Protarchus now holds up each of the original candidates for inspection, he

notably relapses into a 'primitive' notion of pleasure. Instead of fixing his attention on the truest pleasures, or those pleasures which were definitely allowed a space within the good life, he explicitly holds up the most dissipated and contrary pleasures for evaluation. This can look, at first glance, like just so much more Platonic prejudice against pleasure. With respect to truth 'pleasure is the greatest impostor of all. . . and in connection with the pleasures of love, which seem to be the greatest of all, even perjury is pardoned by the gods' (65c5-7); concerning measure, Protarchus does not 'think that one could find anything that is more outside all measure than pleasure and excessive joy' (65d6-7); and concerning beauty, Protarchus the some-time hedonist holds that pleasures' 'effect is quite ridiculous, if not outright obscene; we become quite ashamed of ourselves and hide them as much as possible from sight, and we confine such activities to the night, as if daylight must not witness such things' (66a1-4).

This conventional disparagement of certain pleasures, which give all pleasures a bad name, might seem a cheat on Plato's part, if we lose sight of the fact that we are, in a way, taking up again the old controversy between pleasure and intellect. Granted that they appear together in the mixed life, we want to know in virtue of which is the life as a whole, and so the presence of the other in that life, good – is it the pleasures which make the good life, and the knowledge and mindfulness included in it good, or is it reason which makes the good life and its pleasures good? In order to determine this, we must once again try to look at 'pleasure *qua* pleasure' and 'reason *qua* reason'.[33] While there will be no isolated 'essence' of pleasure to bring up for evaluation, still if it is the pleasure which confers value on the knowledge, then the pleasure should be good *irrespective* of the knowledge, belief, or mindfulness in which it is involved. If this were to be the case, then it should not *matter* which of the pleasures stands in for 'pleasure', when coming before the judge to show its relation to measure, truth and beauty.

Thus the last vestiges of the spectre of enlightened hedonism are officially banished. Once both pleasure and mind were admitted into the good life (22a), the fear remained that the good of reason and knowledge was as instruments for maximising pleasure. The discussion of true and false pleasures gave detailed explanations of why this could not be the role that pleasure plays in a well-mixed life. Plato now officially repudiates pleasures' claims to priority. Pleasure cannot explain the value of truth, of reason, intellect or knowledge. These latter, however, can explain the value of pleasure and also, as we shall see, by being capacities for grasping general principles of value, can explain the value of intellect itself.[34]

VII. The Prize-giving

Despite the expansiveness with which the topic of pleasure is treated, and in spite of the peculiar-looking discussions of methodology and metaphysics, the aims that have been driving and structuring the dialogue have been well sign-posted. Socrates has even rehearsed them again at 60a-e, so that they are freshly put before the reader. In the contest between pleasure and knowledge, both lost the first-prize of being that which suffices to render life *eudaimon*, and the mixed-life won the honour instead. The remainder of the dialogue up to this point should have been working towards deciding which of pleasure and knowledge deserved second prize. From these explicitly stated intentions, the reader would expect a second prize to be awarded, either to pleasure or to knowledge, with the loser perhaps carrying away some third – as yet, never mentioned – prize, by default. If we came to the last page of the dialogue with only these general intentions in mind, then we would be in for a surprise. For no less than five prizes are awarded, in rapid succession – none of them to the well-mixed life.

If, however, we regard the final pages of the dialogue as two separate endings –

the first dealing with the description of the 'first prize winner', the aim in life of all human beings, and the second dealing with what had hitherto been considered the second prize, the cause of goodness and its kin – then it should not be so surprising that the well-mixed life wins no place in the final ranking. And we saw already that the relation between the first-prize winner of the Trial of Lives – the mixed life – and the second-prize winner sought after that point was not straightforward. Where one might have expected a search for the 'second-best thing in life' or even, perhaps the 'second-best life', we were instructed instead to conceive of what 'second prize' would be quite differently. It is a ranking of *sources* of goodness, of explanations of the goodness of the good life just outlined. We are looking for *causes*, *aition* (64c6), *aitian* (64d4) - 'the factor that makes[the mixed life] precious to all mankind' (64c5-6), for 'what is responsible in every mixture for its being either most valuable or worth nothing at all' (64d3-4).

Moreover, we have seen that the question of the 'second prize' was not univocal. From the very first introduction of it, the stipulations any candidate would have to meet, in order to win second prize, were not quite unitary. We wanted on the one hand to specify the causes of goodness, and to show that these are good, presumably both generally and in the good life in particular; and we wanted on the other hand to pick out that element, or those elements, within the good life which were of the same family as the 'good-making' characteristics. While the mixed life may be what we aim at, the second prize winner will tell us both *why* it is good to aim at this life, and what is to count as this life at all, how it is to be recognised as the good life. It should also tell us which elements in the good life should rightly play a more central role in organising the shape of a life and of a soul. It is this cluster of concerns which the final prize-giving will address and order, indicating how these questions relate to one another.

We should also recall that the latest contest between pleasure and knowledge was explicitly for the prize of 'being more closely related' to what is responsible for goodness . 'Measure or the nature of proportion' (64d9), and its manifestation in the trio of beauty, proportion and truth (64e5-65a5) had already claimed the title of being 'responsible for what is in the mixture, for its goodness is what makes the mixture itself a good one.' Already, before the final prize-winners are disclosed, we have been told along the way what the multiple answer to the second question will turn out to be – in fact, because of the relation these various prize-winners have to one another, it would have been impossible for us to get to the point where we could compare pleasure and knowledge without being introduced to 'the nature of measure', to beauty and proportion. But this we will only be able to appreciate in retrospect.

This explains why 'the good life' itself does not appear on the final list. It also explains why certain items – things which we never explicitly considered as candidates – *do* appear. In the end, however, we are not given two or three second-prize winners (the causes of goodness, mind and pleasure), but five – roughly, measure (66a9), the commensurate (66b1), mind (66b4), knowledge (66c1), and true pleasures (66c5). And more difficult than distinguishing the nature of each of the five is determining the relation in which they are supposed to stand to one another, or finding some ordering principle to justify the ranking from first to fifth. The ranking might conceivably be in descending order of power to cause good, or reliability or efficiency in causing it; the ranking might be according to 'proximity' to the good, although this spatial metaphor scarcely illuminates the way in which something might be closer or further from 'the good'. But just as we should not be overly astonished by the number and identity of prize-winners we are also not at a loss to explain the principle ordering and relating them, for it has been a theme running throughout the discussion. The relation holding

our five winners of second prize together, and in their respective places, is, as I hope to show, one of logical and ontological dependency.

First prize, amongst sources of goodness, is awarded to what is 'somewhere in the area of measure, moderation, appropriateness, and everything of that sort' (66a8-10); in second place are 'what is commensurate, beautiful, complete, sufficient, and everything in that category' (66b1-2). The immediate difficulty is in seeing what the difference is supposed to be between these two. For it had hitherto seemed as if *metron*, *to metrion*, and *to summetron* were more or less interchangeable. Yet the first two of these are awarded first prize, while the third is listed second, along with the beautiful, and things of that kind.

We might, however, take our cue from the discussion that immediately precedes the ranking, and from the general principles of priority put forth in the dialogue. In the four-fold ontology, measure was imposed by limit on the unlimited, and it was from this that the beautiful and excellent mixtures resulted. In the discussion of kinds of knowledge, calculating and measuring were distinguished as the qualities in virtue of which any knowledge might count as such (55e). Finally, as we saw (64d9), 'measure and the nature of proportion' were held primarily responsible for making well-mixed things good, for making complex unities genuine wholes. Once isolated, it was these that made beauty and excellence possible (64e6-7).

The difference, then, between first and second prize, might be between measure itself (or as such), and what has measure.[35] And this would also explain the subordination of the latter to the former. Beauty and the proportionate, the sufficient and complete are possible only in virtue of the fact that there is such a thing as measure at all. Something's being beautiful will depend upon whether or not the measures it has are the

measures appropriate to it; and what it will be for certain measures to count as commensurate (proportionate) or otherwise will likewise be evaluated in terms of what it is for anything to be that thing in the best way possible. Sufficiency and completeness, too, will be assessed according to fittingness and measure – or, to put it the other way round, what it will be to be sufficient and complete in any context will be determined by, and thus it will come to be on account of, what it is for the attributes, characteristics or qualities of a thing to be appropriate to the thing it is, and measured (that is, not arbitrary). These were lessons implicit in the ontological discussion of mixture – it is with the mixture that is 'health' that 'there come beauty and strength, and again in our soul there is a host of other excellent qualities' (26b4-5). And as it is the sources of goodness of a particular mixture – the mixed life – with which we are concerned now, it is not out of place that these same points should turn up again here.[36]

This second set of sources of value, together with the first, explain in turn how it is that the third group – reason and intelligence – are able themselves to function as sources of goodness. Completeness and sufficiency, Beauty and commensurability, were the very things towards which we turned our attention first (20d *ff.*) in order to discern whether pleasure or knowledge was the good, and secondly (65a *ff.*) which of them is more akin to the good. In each case, Protarchus was invited to turn his attention to the project of discriminating pleasure, knowledge and good, by fixing his mind on these characteristics, and referring his judgement to these standards. Thus the general characteristics outlined in second place explain what mind is and does by being that (or those things) with reference to which intellect orients itself, makes judgements and evaluations. It is to these that mind looks generally – and, in looking at these, looking also thereby to appropriateness and the very notion of measure – in order to engage in the activity definitive of it. That is to say, if we want to understand what a mind is and does,

what intellect is and does, then we can only do that by making reference to measurement, to proportion, to the ability to recognise the proportionate and beauty with reference to whatever is appropriate, to intelligible (which is to say, measured) things. And it is by this grasping that mind is able in turn to discern what is best, fitting and beautiful in a life and in a soul. Through attachment to the principles according to which anything at all becomes intelligible, the intellect is able to bring out intelligibility in particular spheres, in a human being within a human life.

Mind and intellect, with a view to the beautiful, the perfect, the sufficient and well-proportioned in a human life, are then responsible in turn for determining that this or that is to appear here and now in a life, and in a soul. Thus Socrates' candidate, which had always threatened to come apart, is finally split into two, with 'those things that we defined as the soul's own properties, science and the arts, and what we called true belief' (66b7-c2) ranking fourth. With a view to what makes anything good, and to what makes a human life good, reason and intelligence are responsible for determining what is to come into being, where it belongs in relation to all other elements which most appropriately belong to a well-mixed life. In virtue of its capacity to know and recognise order, intellect is appropriately situated to be sensitive to exactly that order which is most fitting for a human life, and which will make it most beautiful, sufficient and complete. And while there may be all sorts of particular arrangements, none of which is less beautiful than the others (so I might go in for watch-making, while you prefer basket-weaving) – so long as intellect is responsible for the ordering, then it must be acknowledged that, in order for there to be order at all, knowledge – discipline and definition – will have to precede pleasures. Because there is, as already noted, a general ontological dependency of pleasure on knowledge, there is in fact no other way of trying to structure a life. That is, the intelligible structure which intellect grasps as normative is

something built into the very nature of things. Reason does not dictate how things really are – it grasps it. And in the light of this comprehension, reason is responsible for ensuring that a life is as free from contradiction and inconsistency as possible. Thus the goodness of the good life is intimately, and causally related to its truth – to its internal consistency and unity, and to its thereby being an adequate instantiation of the 'facts of the matter', reality, how things are in truth and independently of idiosyncratic human decisions. It is fitting, then, that it should be just here, in the ranking of reason between beauty and appropriateness on the one side, and the knowledges and pleasures of a human life on the other, that truth – one of the two abandoned criteria[37] – should make an oblique reappearance. 'You would not be far from the truth, if I am any prophet, if you gave third place to reason and intelligence,' Socrates tells Protarchus.[38]

Because pleasure – or at least, those pleasures that make a life valuable – can only come into being in a human soul and human life on the condition that there be already knowledge, true beliefs, right judgement, memory and so forth, their ability to make a life good will be dependent upon the prior existence of cognitive capacities.[39] And not just any cognitive capacities, of course. It is only when, and insofar as, the human capacities related to judgement and so forth are themselves 'in working order' – only when they are themselves actively in a position to be contributing to making a human life good – that the pleasures able to arise will be pure pleasures, and thus contribute substantially to the goodness of a human life. Thus it is not the truth of these pleasures which gets mentioned as qualifying them for fifth place.[40] Instead, we are reminded here that 'we called them the soul's own pure pleasures, since they are attached to the sciences, some of them even to sense-perception' (66c6-7). One might be slightly uneasy about the pure pleasures of sense perception appearing just here, especially if the relations between the different prize-winners was supposed to be one of dependency and

explanation. For although the pure pleasures are dependent upon the first two prize-winners for their goodness – they are made pleasures of value, and able to cause value in a life in virtue of being exactly fitting, self-sufficient, perfect-complete – they seem not to be dependent on the third and fourth-prize winners. It is precisely from mind and knowledge that sense-perception, and so its pleasures, is distinguished.

This worry might be allayed if we recall that what sense-perception is and does, and so the pure pleasures of sense-perception, are not simply given. While some sense-perception or another may not be dependent upon intelligence, any sense perception we will recognise as our own must be. In addition, the extreme simplicity which characterises the pure pleasures of sense-perception are not the most basic use of our senses, but rather an *achievement*. Pleasure is not taken in what people ordinarily call beautiful (51c). It is, moreover, an achievement only possible within a soul that is generally well-ordered – and for a human soul, that includes having adequate capacities to take care of basic needs, participating in music and culture, as well as devoting sufficient attention to the abstract sciences. Only in virtue of mind and understanding doing their bit properly, and only with correct judgement and true beliefs about the nature of things generally and about the concrete human world, will it be possible for pure pleasures of sense perception to arise in a soul.

The only part of Protarchus' original candidate for the good that gets a mention are the pure, painless pleasures, which come in fifth (66c5-8). This should not be understood as revoking the earlier claim that the necessary pleasures, the pleasures which follow virtue, and the innocuous pleasures do indeed have a place in the good life.[41] Nor should it be concluded from their failure to appear on the list that they play no role at all in making a good life good. Invoking Orpheus (66c10),[42] Socrates opens up the possibility for further, unspecified sources of value in a human life, sources which are

not as significant as those mentioned, and bearing the same relation of dependency to those preceding them, as each of the specifically ranked sources of goodness bears to those that precede it.

VIII. Finishing Touches

As a 'final touch' to the argument, Socrates offers a 'third libation to Zeus the Saviour' (66d4)[43] – and he begins once again to set out the two original theses whose examination set the agenda for the dialogue. 'Philebus declares that every pleasure of any kind is the good. . .' (66d7). Protarchus protests, 'By the 'third libation' you appear to mean, as you just stated, that we have to repeat the argument all over from the beginning' (66d8-9). But Socrates persists, indicating this time round that he had been motivated in defending his claim 'out of distaste for Philebus' position pronounced by countless others on many occasions' (66e2-3). The dialogue's namesake thus makes it into the discussion one last time, his oblique appearance once again serving as the focal point, by reference to which we can see why discussing these things *matters*. For the argument in the *Philebus* is aimed not at the rare mindless and extreme hedonist – there is no arguing with him, and this is precisely the important point to make clear to those who would be his allies. Many people frequently maintain that pleasure is the good, or speak or act as if this is so – presumably justifying this claim by pointing to the apparent 'fact' that all animals seek pleasure and avoid pain. This claim might be accompanied, or at least implicitly supported by the assumption that there is no further explanation that one can give of why certain things are sought and others avoided, once one has pointed to pleasure or pain. Pleasure and pain, considered as the good, serve as both the ultimate ground of explanation and as the source of value.

Socrates ridicules this position in his closing remarks. Reviewing the main stages

of the argument against hedonism, Socrates concludes: 'And did not pleasure turn out to receive fifth position, according to the verdict we reached in our discussion?' (67a14-15). And at Protarchus' grudging agreement, he goes on –

> 'But not first place, even if all the cattle and horses and the rest of the animals gave testimony by following pleasure. Now, many people accept their testimony, as the seers do that of the birds, and judge that pleasures are most effective in securing the happy life; they even believe that the animal passions are more authoritative witnesses than is the love of argument that is constantly revealed under the guidance of the philosophic muse' (67b1-7)

It is not just that issues of value are not the sort that are decided by majority. No matter how many creatures testify to the attractiveness of pleasure, this still does not make pleasure something good, but merely something attractive to many creatures. There is, however, the more delicate matter of who might be called as a witness. Just as it is inappropriate to look to the behaviour of birds when trying to anticipate the likely behaviour and fates of men, so it is likewise uninformative to look to the behaviour of animals when trying to determine what a human life should or could be, what kind of person one should be, how one should live, or what one should do. We do not, by looking at animals, arrive at the 'real truth' about our own animal nature. On the contrary – whatever in us is similar to creatures quite unlike us in other respects will have a different significance, hold a different place and carry a different weight, simply in virtue of the co-existence of these 'animal passions' within the same complexly related whole that houses judgement, memory, anticipation and reason.

IX. Centrality of Character

As recently as 1999, Rosalind Hursthouse prefaced her book on what she describes as 'neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics' with the following:

> 'Virtue ethics' is a term of art, initially introduced to distinguish an approach in normative ethics which emphasizes the virtues, or moral character. . .[44]

'Virtue ethics', and 'character ethics', are equally technical terms, recently enough coined for pragmatic purposes that it hardly seems appropriate to insist that they are being used *wrongly*. Such labels are to be used in whatever way they will be most helpful, and as it happens these two are largely used interchangeably. I want to maintain that there is vital difference between work in moral theory that focuses on virtues, and a moral theory that focuses on character. These are in fact distinct strands within ethical thinking, with distinct questions and concerns, although they are importantly related.[45] Indeed, it is by recognising that they are distinct that we shall be able to see the significance of their relation to one another. And if we do not make this distinction clear, it is the questions and concerns about character and persons – those concerns which are our Platonic inheritance – which go missing in the plenitude of virtues.

Without attention to what it is to be a person, and to why it is important to be a person, a virtue centred way of engaging in ethical reflection is in danger of losing its moorings. The danger on the one hand, for virtue ethics, is that its description of 'flourishing' or of being well-off may turn to physics as a substitute for the normative metaphysics that is missing. By some more or less complicated route, we grasp what is good for human beings by looking to the kind of animal they are. On the other hand, ejecting this as a basis for the flourishing that virtues are both instrumental to and symptoms of seems to land one with the expressivist alternative. If our conceptions of flourishing can override our knowledge of biological facts, we still lack a basis for preferring any one conception of flourishing over another. Of course, we can assess

varying conceptions according to the standards and values we already have – but this procedure is ultimately self-reinforcing, and seems unable to indicate when it is the standards and values themselves that need to go.

Thus Hursthouse continues,

> I am making certain assumptions about my readership. It is not possible to write a book in moral philosophy without taking a fair amount of common ground for granted, and I am assuming that anyone who is interested enough in the area to read such a book shares my own ethical outlook to a fair extent.[46]

We may well wonder how much agreement is sufficiently extensive to make it possible to write a book in moral philosophy, and how much agreement would be sufficiently extensive to make moral philosophy beside the point.

A character-centred approach to ethics will be less interested in whether this or that is an instance of virtue, or a virtue in general. Instead, it asks what kind of thing a character, or person, is that it can have virtues. Why does it matter for persons to be good in certain ways (while it is unimportant that they be, for example, good vocalists)? What is integrity, and why should it matter? (Or what is consistency in a soul, and why is it so important?) What kind of thing is a person that it could be both of value, and a source of value? This is one way of looking deeper into the phenomenon articulated by Aristotle, that a good person has a good outlook on the world, sees things rightly.[47] How could it be that there is such a thing as a 'good way of seeing', and in what might it consist?

The importantly Platonic point is that these are questions at once about the nature of persons and about the nature of goodness. What kind of thing is goodness that we *can* perceive it, or fail to, and more importantly, that we can *learn* to see, think and feel well? What kind of goodness is it that persons have that it must be acquired (even if it is not

learned from a text-book)? What is goodness that we suppose it possible for discourse about value to be meaningful, and perhaps even fruitful? And what relation must persons have to value in order for this to be so? This is the level on which questions are being asked in the *Philebus*. And what we find is that the process of addressing these questions goes a long way towards indicating what kinds of lives could and could not be counted happy, and *from this* what may or may not be counted as instrumentally or constitutively part of this process.

Goodness, whatever else it may be, is real, single and complex. Unqualified value is not scattered about in competing values. And although we might none of us have a comprehensive view of the entirety of goodness as such (65a), we can all come better to understand what counts as good in life and why it matters by looking to the kind of thing that goodness is (20c *ff.*), and the kinds of requirements or demands on reality there must be, if there is to be any conception of normativity at all (23c-27c). These demands are simultaneously on what kind of thing we, as persons, must be in order to value and evaluate (esp. 21c, 29b-30b, 31b-40c, 47d-50d) and on the kind of context such complex and integrated wholes as persons are must find themselves within in order to make sense (28b-30e). It is in virtue of this unity of value that to make sense of the world is simultaneously to make sense of a person and a life, and that seeking to live well by seeking the good *is* the good for human beings (22a-c, 59e-64c). There is, then, some thing out there for the understanding, for *our* understanding, to grasp (14b).

'Things being structured thus, we have to assume that there is in each case always one form for every one of them, and we must search for it, as we will indeed find it there' (16d2-5). And this reveals something about understanding as well as about value. Mind and reason can engage dialectically, that is, be responsive to truth and reality as such and for no further, practical purpose (16d-18d, 58a-d). And in virtue of this, they are, and

dialectic in particular is, uniquely suited for recognising and measuring relations constitutive of unity or wholeness – were they not, something else would be called by those names (58d). And it is because of this capacity to see the unity within complexity that mind is rightly trusted to unify rightly the complexity that makes up each soul.

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[1] 'would there be some justification in our claim that we are by now standing on the very threshold of the good and of the house of every member of its family?'

[2] Cf. 22d-e, 64c

[3] Contra D. Frede [1993], who maintains (pg. lxvi) that we are concerned only with the good for human beings, leaving general metaphysical points aside. I agree that we are concerned with the good for human beings, but maintain that the arguments of the *Philebus* are meant to show that this should not, and cannot, be treated separately from metaphysical questions about normativity and intelligibility. Cf. also Harte [1999].

[4] From this is does not follow, however, (contra Hampton [1990]) that it is *mind* which is identified with the good. The peculiarity of the *Philebus'* good lies in what sense it could have to pick such a thing as a mixed life as the good for human beings.

[5] As Gosling [1975] 181 points out: 'Strictly, even such argument as if offered [at 20c *ff.*] could only prove that the mixed life is better than the present candidates, not that it is the good.'

[6] The good life consists not in the goods, but in the living. We might compare here *Meno* 78d *ff.*, where Socrates argues that what matters is not what you do (acquire good things), but *how* you do it (justly, etc.).

[7] Neither the mollusc-life, nor the divine life was a desirable one (21d-e). I shall say more in what follows about the importance of the distinction between the human life and the divine.

[8] This takes us back to the consequentialist flaw at the heart of hedonism. (Cf. Chapter 5)

[9] If this is right, then the failure to call the mixed life 'complete' at the original Trial of Lives (22a-b) may have been a piece of foreshadowing, rather than an oversight.

[10] If, that is, we read the *Republic* as depicting the guardians as having ideal lives, while their compatriots in the lower classes have inferior lives.

[11] On the comparison between the ethical outlook of the *Republic* and that of the *Philebus*, see Hampton [1990]. While it is perhaps sensible not to be over-enthusiastic about the friendlier approach to pleasure

that Plato seem to have in the *Philebus*, it is also a loss, I think, to insist on reading into the *Philebus* the *Republic*'s apparent endorsement of the austere life. (Cf. D. Frede [1994] lxiii n. 2)

[12] Plato, we know, could not have been unaware of the possibility that a mixed pleasure, such as love, might reveal value to us – this might be taken as one of the lessons learned in the *Symposium*. But that dinner-party happened long ago, in terms of the usual dating of the Platonic dialogues, and it may be that Plato is not so friendly to love now as he was then. After all, Socrates has already promised to explain to Protarchus the pleasures he would count as true – and when he makes good his promise, love does not fit under any of the descriptions of true pleasure. By definition, in fact, it *could* not, since the true pleasures are 'pure' (unmixed with their opposite), while love is decidedly a mixture. (Cf. also *Phaedrus*)

We do, however, have some warrant for supposing that at least this one mixed pleasure, love, can indeed be a vital condition to perceiving and pursuing a good life. In the efficient analysis of kinds of knowledge at 55c to 59d, Socrates argued that 'the power of dialectic would refute us if we put any science ahead of her' (57e5-6). Dialectic was first described as the 'discipline concerned with being and with what is really and forever in every way eternally self-same' (58a3-4). But in defending the primacy of dialectic over the art favoured by Protarchus' teacher, Gorgias, dialectic became the science which 'is by its nature a capacity in our soul to love the truth and to do everything for its sake' (58d3-4). This noteworthy description bears no obvious relation to the methodology claimed at the beginning of the dialogue to constitute the difference between *eristic* and *dialectic* (17a4), and is strikingly out of keeping with the dry, analytic tone of the rest of the passage treating of knowledge. But Socrates does not just persist in his claim – he makes this 'capacity to love the truth' the distinguishing mark of *whatever* makes claim to be the most worthy science. 'And if thorough reflection and sufficient discussion confirms this for our art, then we can say that it is most likely to possess purity of mind and reason. Otherwise we would have to look for a higher kind of knowledge than this' (58d4-7).

[13] We might recall that the good man (39e *ff.*) hoped for the same thing as the wicked man, but enjoyed therein a true pleasure.

[14] Why does Plato have Socrates draw our attention to Philebus' silence just now? It may be a pointed way of indicating that the mindless hedonist has been reduced finally, once and for all, to inarticulateness. He cannot even say anything on his own behalf. It may also, however, call our attention to the fact that the good life, construed as it has just been, leaves the pleasure-lover precious little to protest against. The

well-mixed life is not devoid of pleasure. What will the dogmatic hedonist claim is *missing* – the thrills of debauchery?

[15] and perhaps what further determinations such a mixture might include or preclude

[16] We have looked already at the peculiar way in which truth functions both as criterion to evaluate candidate ingredients, and as itself an ingredient added separately to the mixture, and suggested some reason for this.

[17] 'But there was also a difference between different sciences, since one kind deals with a subject matter that comes to be and perishes, the other is concerned with what is free of that, the eternal and self-same.'

[18] Cf. *Timaeus* 47c-e, where the point of music in a human life is instrumental: it is a necessary tool for bringing the motions of the spheres of our soul into line with the motions of the spheres of the cosmos.

[19] Cf. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* VII, 1 (1145a23-27), 'Therefore if, as they say, men become gods by excess of virtue, of this kind must evidently be the state opposed to the brutish state; for as a brute has no vice or virtue, so neither has a god; his state is higher than virtue, and that of a brute is a different kind of state from vice.' Genuine parity of treatment here would require either that beasts are thoroughly vicious, or that the divine state is not higher than, but something different from virtue.

[20] Irwin [1995] suggests that this co-ordinative role was already the distinctive function of intellect in the *Republic*. If it is there not yet obvious what the 'rule of reason' should involve, we have in this passage of the *Philebus* a vivid portrayal of one interpretation.

[21] 'To forge an association between reason and those pleasures that are forever involved with foolishness and other kinds of vice would be totally unreasonable for anyone who aims at the best and most stable mixture and blend.'

[22] Contra Frede [1993], who finds that both content of the good life, and method for discerning proper content, are missing in the *Philebus;* that these are long projects for which the *Philebus* is merely a preamble, showing that the work is necessary; and that these projects are brought to fruition in the *Laws* and the *Timaeus*, respectively. I find, by contrast, quite a lot in the *Philebus* about the method for discerning good mixture; and further that attending to this will explain why we are mistaken to look for a treatise on the content of a well-lived life.

[23] On this view, agreeing to consider courage, and not dishonesty, a virtue is vacuous; for it tells us nothing of how courage is distinguished from rashness. An account of the value of character that treats persons as

wholes can provide a basis for drawing these lines.

[24] Cf. Murdoch [1970], 'On "God" and "Good"'.

[25] 'We are by now,' says Socrates, 'standing on the very threshold of the good and of the house of every member of its family.'

[26] The image of 'growing' or 'cultivating' would be a better one here than 'constructing', even if it is builders that Socrates invokes at 59e. There is a link, perhaps, between the builders of the earlier passage, and the house of the good (64c) that they are building.

[27] 'One of us might want to give credit for the combined life to reason, making it responsible, the other to pleasure. Thus neither of the two would be the good, but it could be assumed that one or the other of them is its *cause*. But I would be even more ready to contend against Philebus that, whatever the ingredient in the mixed life may be that makes it choiceworthy and good, reason is more closely related to that thing and more like it than pleasure.' (22d2-e1)

[28] An answer – not Plato's – might be that this most fulfils our human nature, most satisfies 'what it is to be' human, and thereby makes such an individual living such a life the finest exemplar of humanity. Such an answer, from a Platonic point of view, leaves unaddressed precisely the crucial question about what it is that explains that just *this*, rather than any other human possibilities, is the finest example of what it is to be human.

[29] Cf. Chapter 1, section II.

[30] Some of this was foreshadowed in the 'cosmological' argument, discussed in Chapter 3.

[31] Why virtue? And why does 'virtue' disappear from the characterisation of the good? It might be that 'excellence' is taken to be redundant and uninformative in a discussion of the good. If virtue is taken in a narrower sense of 'those qualities attaching to a person in virtue of which he might be considered *eudaimon*', then to include it would simply restate the issue, rather than offer an explanation.

[32] Cf. D. Frede [1993] and Harte [1999], contra Sayre [1983].

[33] Verity Harte asks me why we should use the hedonist's conception of pleasure, rather than the rationalist's. Besides the fact that, in order to avail oneself of the rationalist's conception of pleasure, one must already be a rationalist, to even conceive of pleasure as the rationalist does is already to have answered the question of priority that is now being asked explicitly. (Cf. Chapters 4 and 5)

[34] Without the value of reason becoming thereby self-explanatory if that means self-evident, for the

explanation it is able to offer – as will become clear – proceeds via general principles.

[35] The difficulty, I acknowledge, with this reading is the *to* before *metrion* in the first-ranked winners. In second place, I take *to summetron kai kalon* together as responsible for the goodness in things, and *to teleon kai hikanon* together as the necessary condition on anything being a well-formed whole.

[36] What does this do for the *Phaedo's* notion that the only proper explanation, or formal cause, of beauty was 'the Beautiful itself' or 'Beauty itself'? If that was a claim about the starting-points of explanation, rather than a claim to have found a conclusive explanation, then this might well be something like a second stop. There can, after all, be a general explanation of beauty, even if only in very general terms involving what it is to be a mixture (and in specific [kinds of] cases, what it is to be this sort of mixed thing).

[37] Along with desirability from the first set of three, at the Trial of Lives.

[38] It may also be no accident, in light of the peculiar 'cosmology' advocated by Socrates earlier, that this uncalled-for mention of divination should accompany 'reason and intelligence' – the very notions of divinity with which Socrates offered to replace the old gods of Mt. Olympus. (Cf. Chapter 3)

[39] Where the 'priority' here is ontological, not temporal

[40] Contra Harte [1994]

[41] Contra D. Frede [1993] lxvi

[42] 'With the sixth generation the well-ordered song may find its end'

[43] Is the *Philebus* a re-working, or simply an elaboration of *Republic IX*? Because this depends very much on how we read the *Republic*, I will not got into this here, but simply note in passing the striking similarity. After sending out a herald to announce the first demonstration of the superiority of the just life (*Rep.* 580b), Socrates dedicates the third proof to Zeus the Saviour (*Rep.* 583b).

[44] Hursthouse [1999] 1

[45] I am, then, a moderate Coleridgean in MacIntyre's sense ([1990] 242-24). Perhaps Plato and Aristotle do not offer exactly *rival* accounts of morality; but the focus of their attentions, the question each poses, bring out quite different aspects of moral life. And the questions Plato is interested in are *distinct* from Aristotle's – we cannot, therefore, look to the latter as a key to, or final maturation of, the thought of the former. Plato's questions cannot be addressed by doing more of what Aristotle does; and, I would argue, Aristotle's project is frustratingly limited if we lose sight of the Platonic concerns that stand behind it. One might go further, in the light of the peculiar way that choosing an ethical system is itself a *moral* choice,

and say that because Plato's and Aristotle's views about what was important in ethical reflection were so different, then so too were their actual moral values. (Other Coleridgeans include Murdoch [1970], Holland [1980], Winch [1981], Gaita [1991] [1999], and I think Nehamas [1998].)

[46] Hursthouse [1999] 8

[47] For this interpretation of Aristotle, see e.g. McDowell [1998] and [1995].

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